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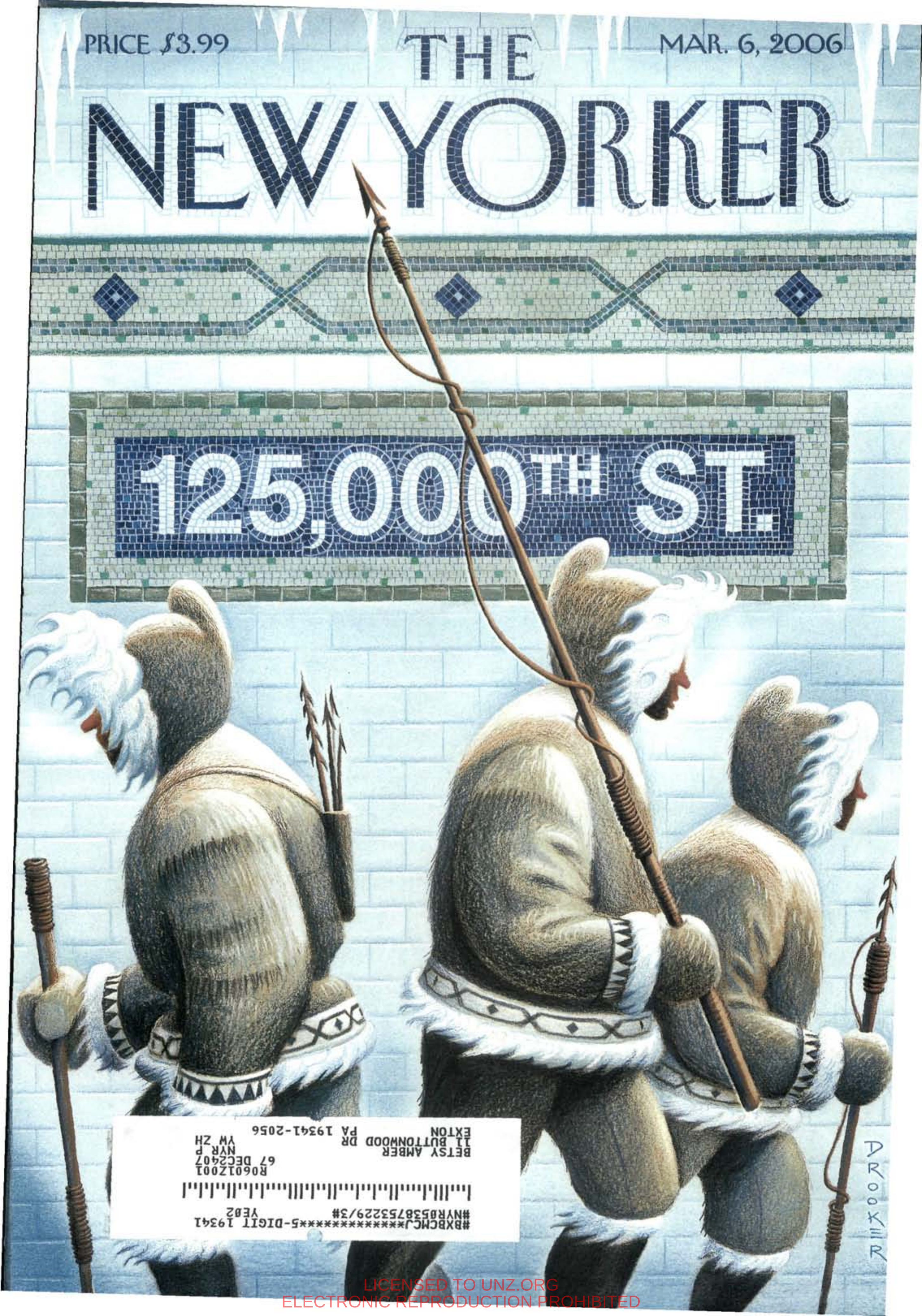
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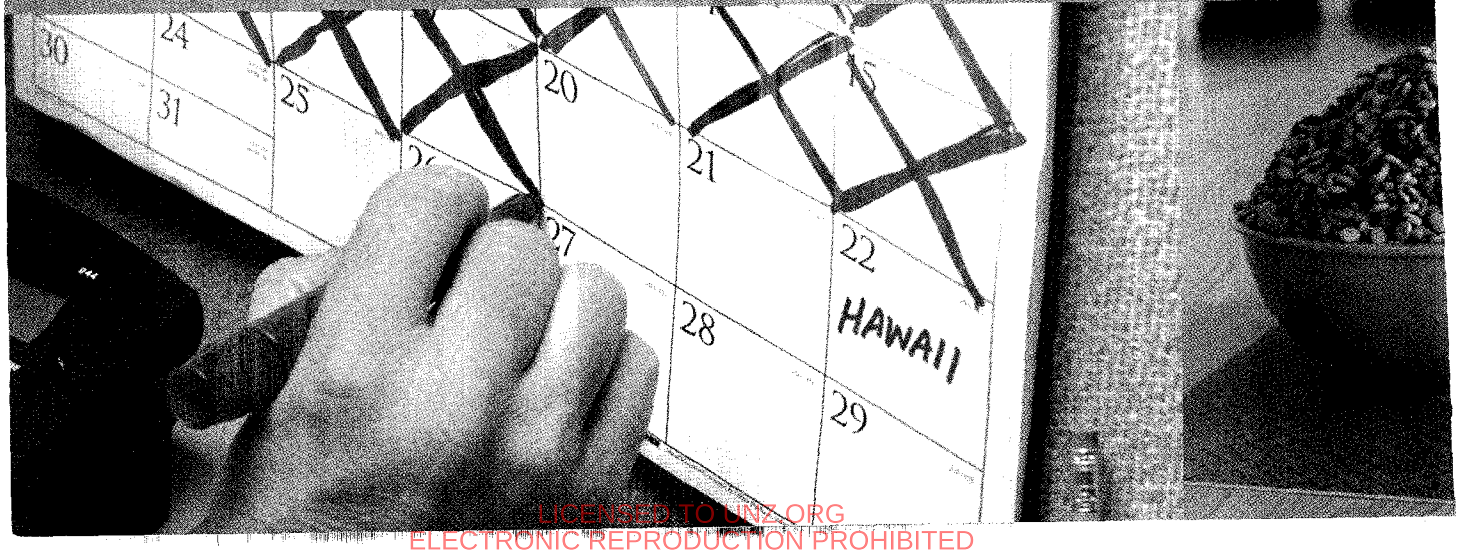
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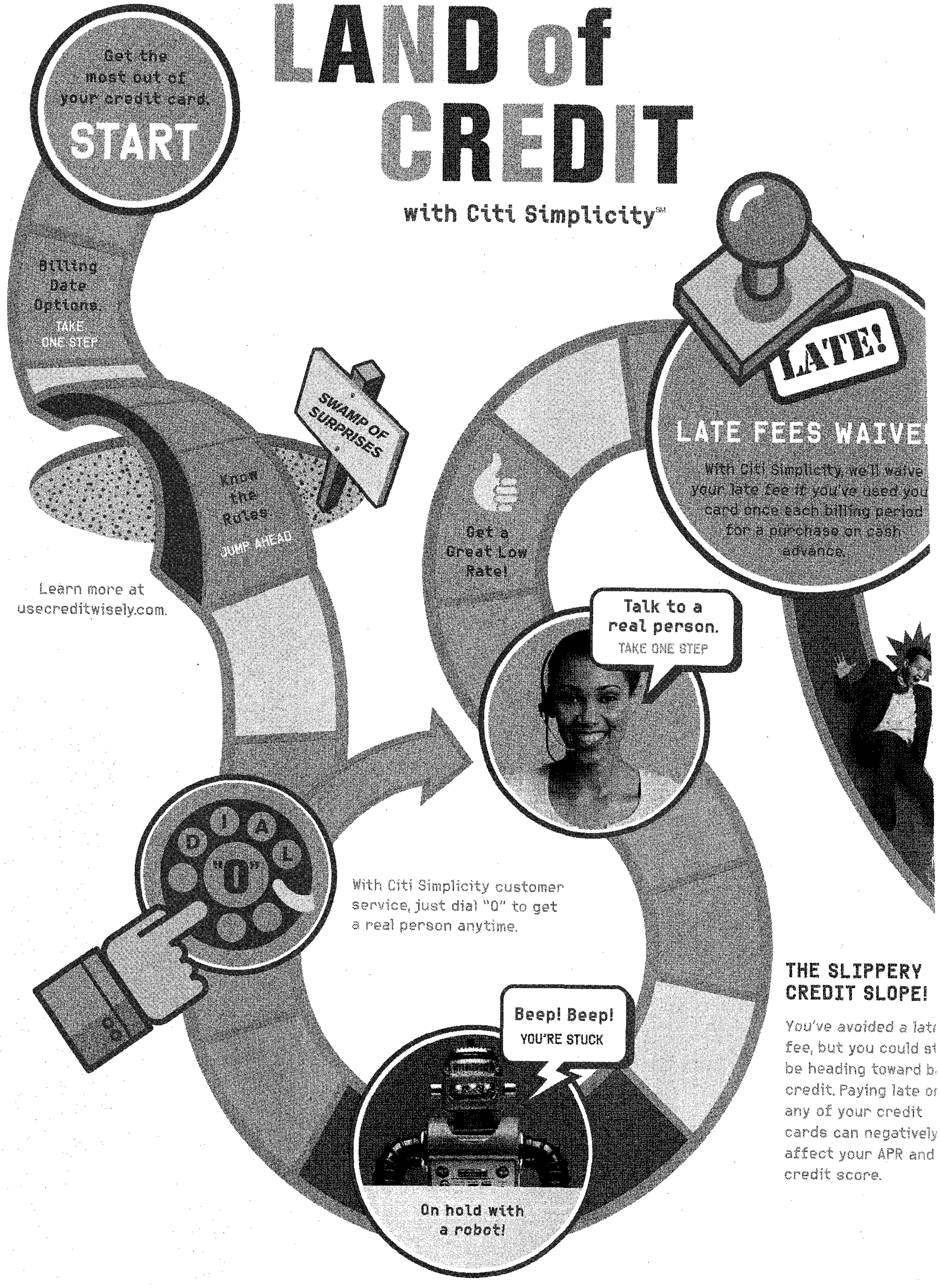
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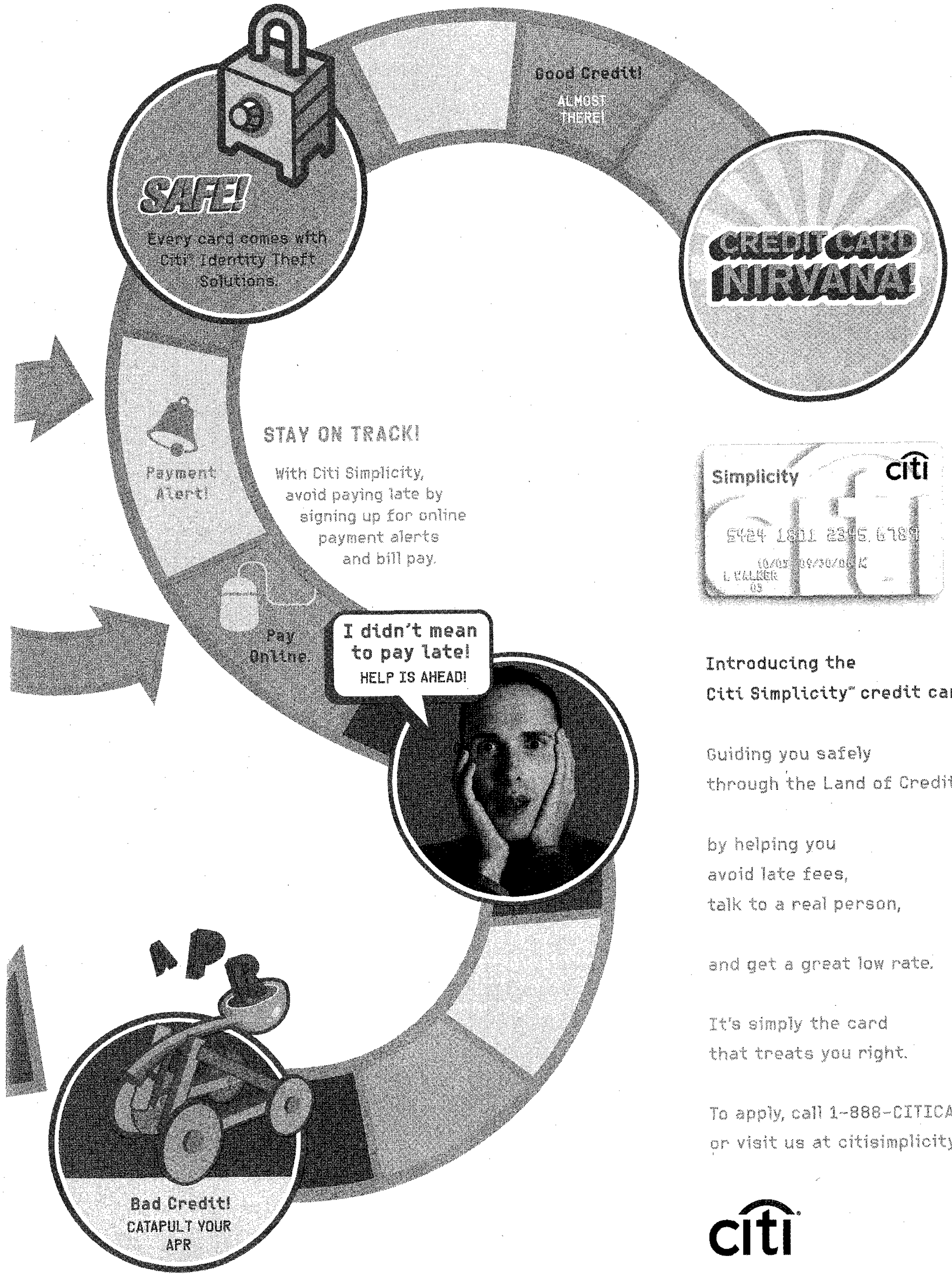
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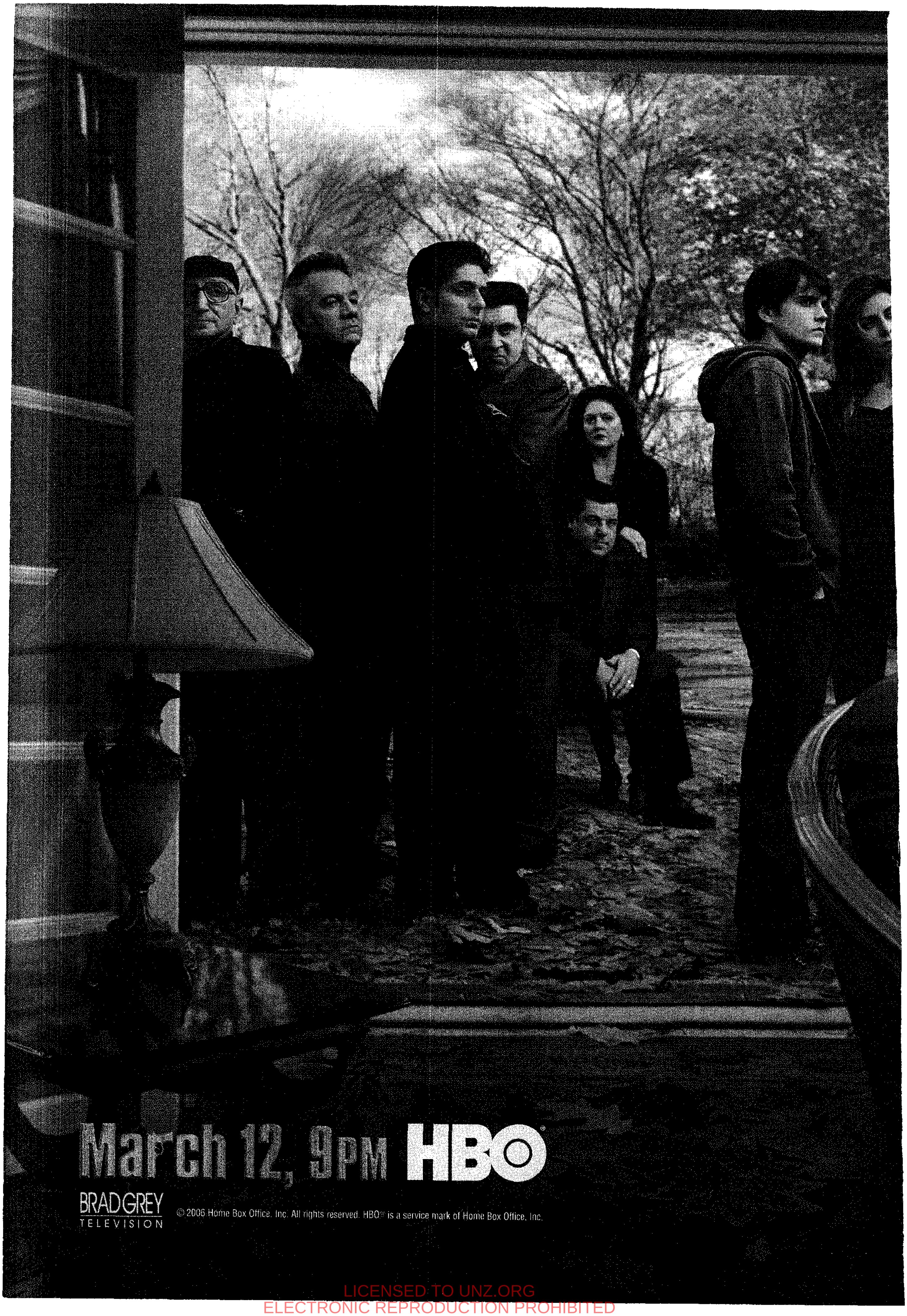
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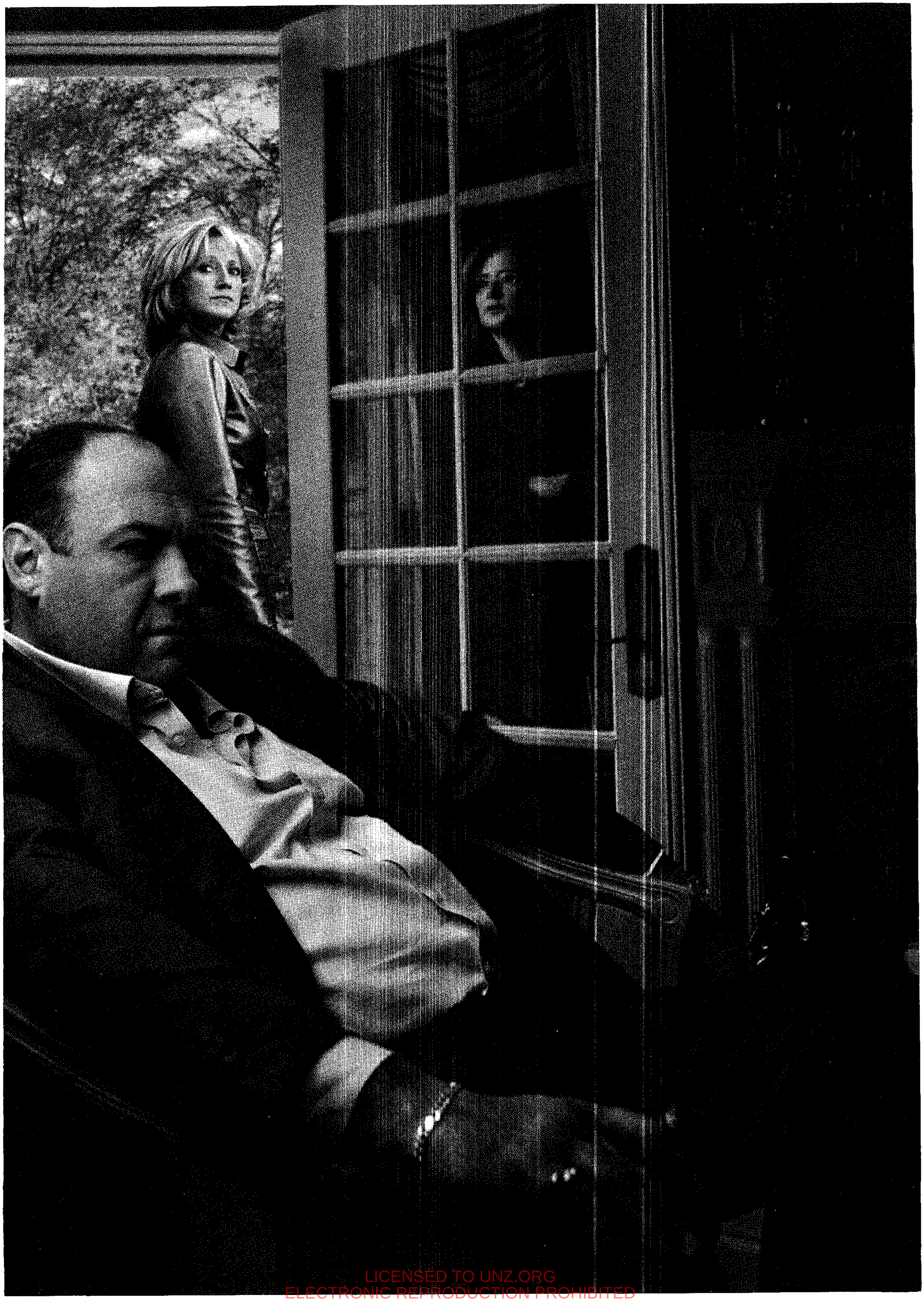

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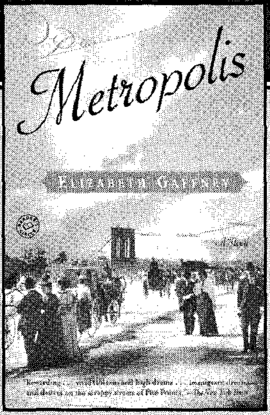

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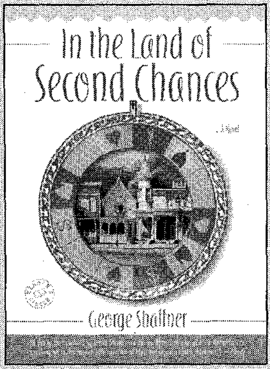

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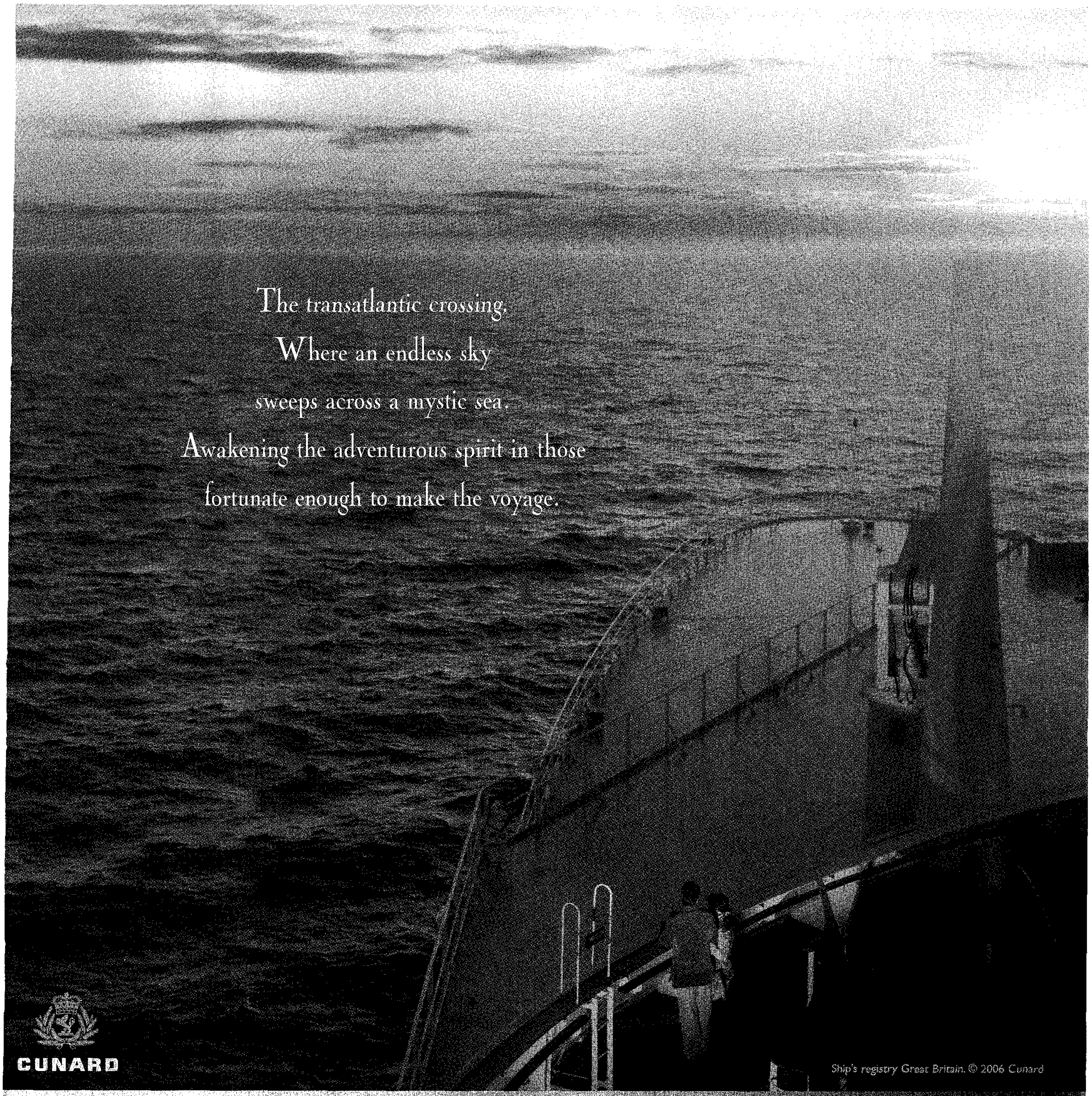
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Malcolm Gladwell talks about the blossoming of creativity, and how society measures it.

David Denby talks about documentaries, today's movie stars, and this year's Oscars.

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CONTRIBUTORS

Connie Bruck ("Exiles," p. 48) is a staff writer.

Paul Rudnick (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 38), a novelist and playwright, is a regular contributor of humor pieces.

Hendrik Hertzberg (Comment, p. 27) is a senior editor and staff writer. He is a board member of FairVote, a nonpartisan group that supports electoral reforms, including direct election of the President.

Fintan O'Toole ("A Mind in Connemara," p. 40) is the chief drama critic of the *Irish Times*. His book "White Savage: William Johnson and the Invention of America" was published in October.

Elizabeth Bishop (Poem, p. 58), a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, died in 1979. "Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box: Uncollected Poems, Drafts, and Fragments," edited by Alice Quinn, is due out next week.

Jeffrey Toobin ("Drawing the Line," p. 32), a staff writer, is working on a book about the U.S. Supreme Court, to be published in 2007.

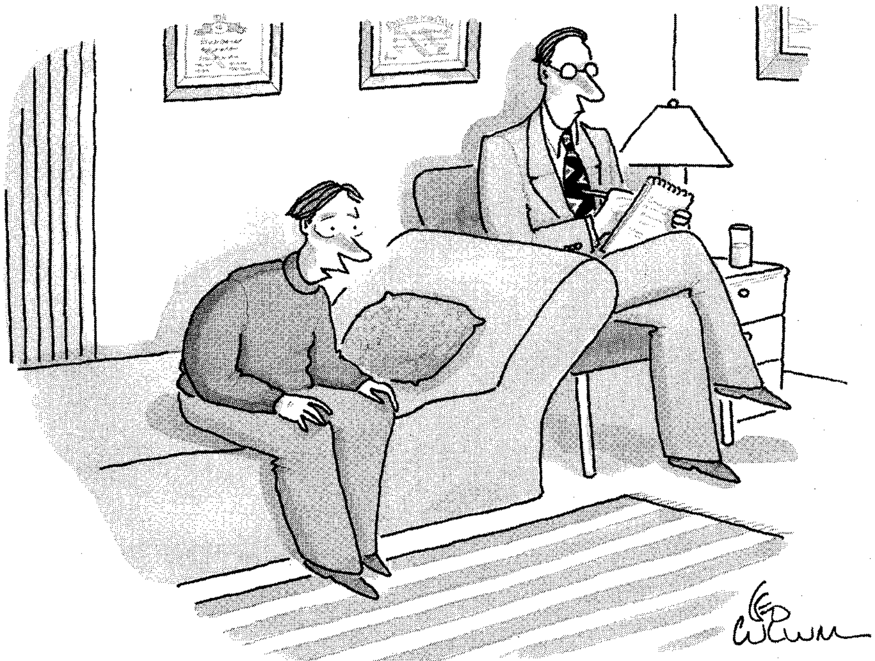
Jay Hopler (Poem, p. 45) won the Yale Younger Poets prize last year for "Green Squall," his first collection of poems, which will be published in April.

Roz Chast (Cartoon, p. 57) is a regular contributor. She is the author of "The Party, After You Left."

Charles D'Ambrosio (Fiction, p. 64) has a book of short stories, "The Dead Fish Museum," coming out in April.

Peter Schjeldahl (The Art World, p. 76) is the magazine's art critic.

Keith Gessen (Books, p. 82) is a co-editor of the magazine *n+1*. The paperback edition of his translation of Svetlana Alexievich's "Voices from Chernobyl" comes out in April. ♦



"The voices in my head want to sing on 'American Idol.'"

THE MAIL

TEEN-AGE PREGNANCY

As an attorney who represents some of the most vulnerable teen-age mothers, those who are themselves in foster care because they were victims of abuse or neglect, I have seen the positive impact of the Nurse-Family Partnership as Katherine Boo describes it ("Swamp Nurse," February 6th). But, while I understand the reasoning behind the program's restraints, the fact that the Nurse-Family Partnership will not work with a young woman who is already past her twenty-eighth week of pregnancy or who is having her second (or third, fourth, or fifth) child severely limits its impact. Currently, in New York City, it serves only certain Zip Codes in Brooklyn, upper Manhattan, and Queens, and is just now opening a branch in the Bronx. The social and financial costs of teen-age parenthood can be reduced only with more funding and more flexible nurse-visiting programs. It is shameful to squander any opportunity to make a positive and long-lasting impact on an adolescent parent.

Dale Margolin
Staff Attorney, Legal Aid Society
New York City

PAPAL PARDON

As Timothy W. Ryback indicates in his examination of Pope Benedict XVI and the Second World War, since the liberation of Europe and Germany by the Allied forces, in 1945, the German people have been collectively held responsible for Nazism and its atrocities ("Forgiveness," February 6th). But the responsibility to insure that Nazism will not be repeated shouldn't be confused with personal guilt. It is indisputable that war brings out the worst in men, and its victims included those who wore Nazi uniforms as well as German civilians. While this does not outweigh the suffering of those persecuted by the Nazis, there is no point in judging who suffered more. The fact that the Pope is German and was forced to wear a military uniform in his youth does not necessarily insinuate any political meaning in his offering German soldiers, even members of the Waffen S.S., forgiveness. The Pope, being the representative of God on earth, must not distinguish between sufferers, no matter what quality of suffering they endured.

Uwe Schwarz
Augsburg, Germany

DEFINING MIRACLES

Joan Acocella was thoughtful to mention my book, "Mary Magdalene: A Biography," but I feel that she misread it ("The Saintly Sinner," February 13th & 20th). She cites my use of the phrase "resuscitation literalists" as part of an argument that "older liberal clergy" make against the Resurrection. I am happy to have lived long enough to be described as older, and contrarian enough to enjoy being called liberal. But in my book I argued that Resurrection literalists have overlooked Jesus' own words, which describe entry into a resurrected existence as being "like angels." Would Acocella say of Jesus' criticism of the Sadducees, as she says of my exegesis, that it was "unkind"? She also misapprehends my position in regard to miracles. During the Enlightenment, miracles came to be defined as breaches of the laws of nature. But that definition is not evident in the classical sources of religious experience. The Gospels represent no concern with natural law or with breaking it. Rather, they portray God influencing events so as to remove evil (exorcism), cure disease (healing), and offer signs of the divine world (visions). I have shown that Mary Magdalene took up these practices with Jesus and refined them.

Bruce Chilton
Bernard Iddings Bell Professor of Religion, Bard College
Annandale, N.Y.

•

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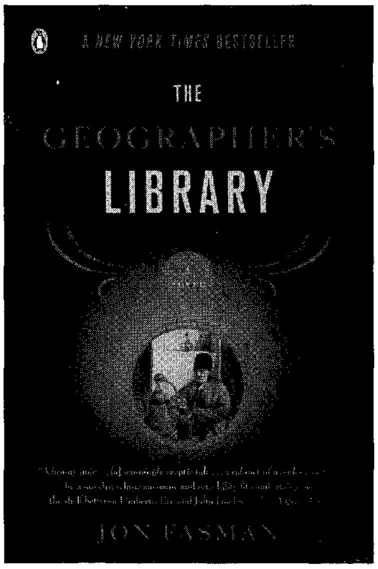

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The New Jersey-based hard-rock band Satanicide. Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
LOVE NOTES

The New Group has been spawning hip shows—"Abigail's Party," "Avenue Q," "Hurlyburly"—for a decade. Its latest production is the world première of "The Music Teacher," by Wallace Shawn, opening this week at the Minetta Lane Theatre, about a young teacher who becomes infatuated with his prodigious female student as they create an opera together. Shawn's brother, Allen, wrote the music for the opera within the play. (See page 12.)

NIGHT LIFE
ST. ANDREWS EXPORT

KT Tunstall, a thirty-year-old singer-songwriter from Scotland, is the talent behind "Eye to the Telescope," the top-selling album in the U.K. over the past year by a female artist. Tunstall recently released the disk here, and this week she's at the Bowery Ballroom. (See page 14.)

ART
"DAY FOR NIGHT"

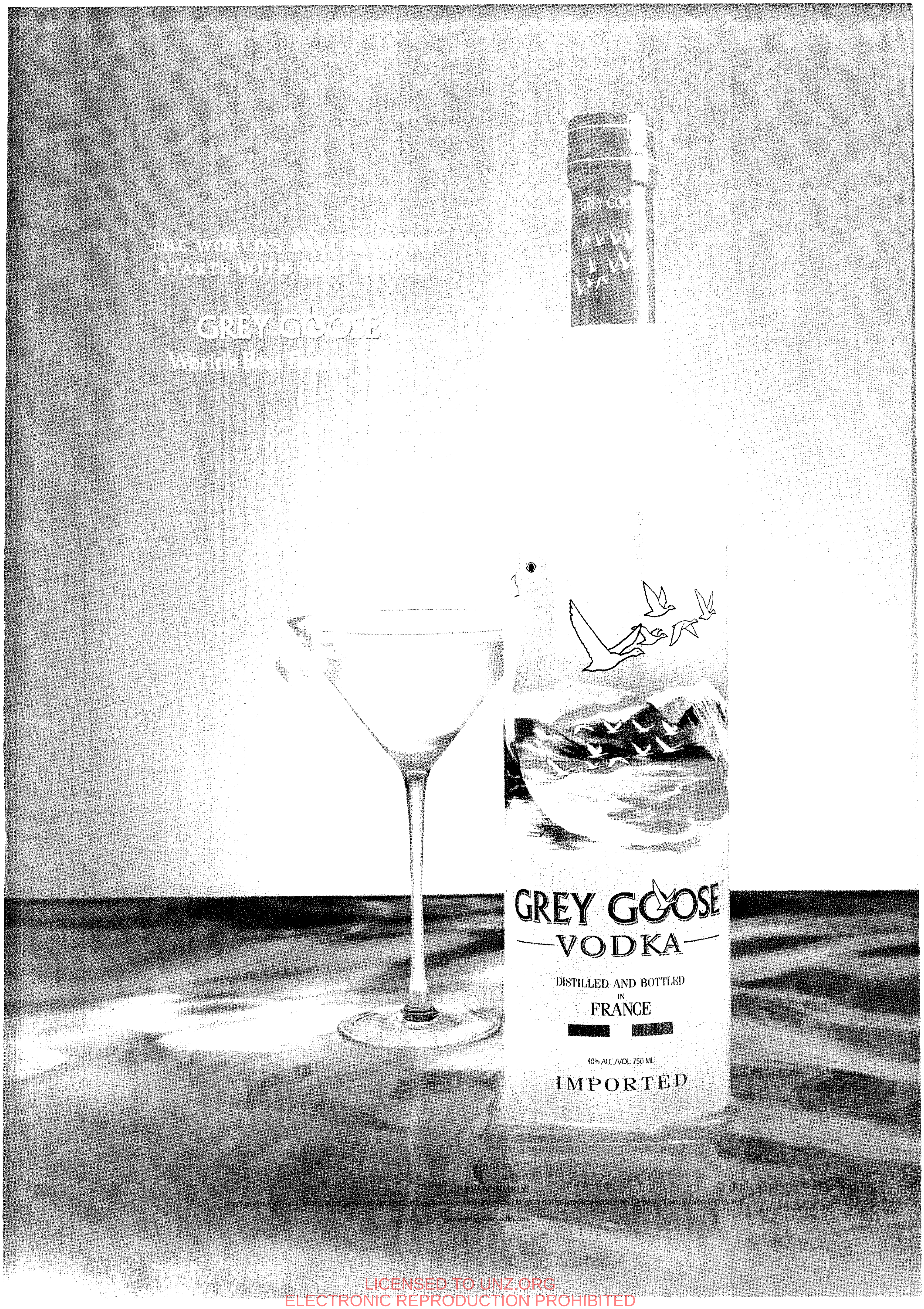
The 2006 Whitney Biennial opens this week, and it promises, as always, to generate lively debate and strong opinions. The curators this year are Philippe Vergne and Chrissie Iles, who have taken a more international approach than in previous years. (See page 15.)

MOVIES
HOCUS FOCUS

Anthology Film Archives presents "Magic and the American Avant-Garde Cinema." The program includes Maya Deren's footage of Haitian voodoo ceremonies, Kenneth Anger's "Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome," based on Aleister Crowley's occult rituals, and Stan Brakhage's "Christ Mass Sex Dance." (See page 22.)

READINGS AND TALKS
STORMIN' NORMAN

Norman Mailer, the novelist, journalist, and onetime candidate for mayor of New York City, hands down the wisdom of his experience to his son John Buffalo Mailer in their new book, "The Big Empty." The two continue their discussion about women, religion, sports, gambling, current events, critics, drugs, the future of the American novel, and more at the New York Society for Ethical Culture. (See page 24.)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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
INCREDIBLE JOURNEY

By the time Eugene O'Neill died, in 1953 at the age of sixty-five, America's only Nobel Prize-winning playwright had suffered a professional reversal of fortune. Despite the admiration of younger bards such as Tennessee Williams, the father of American realist drama was considered old-fashioned by theatregoers who had yet to see "Long Day's Journey Into Night," arguably O'Neill's last masterpiece. To mark the fiftieth anniversary of the play's première, Ric Burns has directed an intensely moving and historically thorough documentary, "Eugene O'Neill," which premières on March 27 as part of PBS's "American Experience." As a further example of O'Neill's range, the Wooster Group, under the direction of Elizabeth LeCompte, is staging "The Emperor Jones" (1920), at St. Ann's Warehouse, beginning March 1. Starring the incandescent Kate Valk as Brutus Jones, a black man in search of a kingdom, the show proves that the classically minded O'Neill lives on as a source of expressionistic spectacle.

—*Hilton Als*

SETH

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

BERNARDA ALBA
Phylicia Rashad stars in a new musical by Michael John LaChiusa, in which the strong will of a recent widow is subverted by her rebellious daughters. Choreographed and directed by Graciela Daniele. In previews. Opens March 6. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE EMPEROR JONES
The Wooster Group's production of Eugene O'Neill's play, about a Pullman porter (Kate Valk) who lands in jail, escapes to a Caribbean island, and tricks the people there into naming him their emperor. In previews. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

ENTERTAINING MR. SLOANE
Alec Baldwin stars in a revival of Joe Orton's play, in which a saucy landlady and her brother fall for the same man. Directed by Scott Ellis. In previews. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

FAMILY SECRETS
Bob Balaban directs this one-woman show written and performed by Sherry Glaser, about a Jewish family from the Bronx that has relocated to California. In previews. (37 Arts, 450 W. 37th St. 212-307-4100.)

FATBOY
The winner of the Fringe First Award, this absurdist comedy by John Clancy skewers the American tendency toward gluttony. Previews begin March 4. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-868-4444.)

GREY GARDENS
The cult film by the Maysles brothers about two Bouvier women living in a dilapidated Hamptons manse has been adapted into a musical, starring Christine Ebersole and Mary Louise Wilson. Directed by Michael Greif. In previews. Opens March 7. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

HEDDA GABLER
Cate Blanchett and Hugo Weaving star in a Sydney Theatre Company production of Ibsen's classic play. Opens March 1. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

MEASURE FOR MEASURE
The Pearl presents Shakespeare's dark comedy, directed by Beatrice Terry. In previews. Opens March 5. (80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

MEASURE FOR PLEASURE
A new comedy by David Grimm, about a transvestite prostitute, at the Public. In previews. Opens March 8. (425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200.)

THE MUSIC TEACHER
The New Group presents a new play by Wallace Shawn, about a young teacher who creates an opera with his protégée. In previews. Opens March 6. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100.)

RING OF FIRE, THE JOHNNY CASH MUSICAL SHOW
The stories of the songs of Johnny Cash are portrayed in a new musical directed by Richard Maltby, Jr. In previews. (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

SIDD
A new musical inspired by "Siddhartha," the Herman Hesse classic about a man's wanderings toward enlightenment. In previews. (Dodger Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

NOW PLAYING

ACTS OF MERCY: PASSION-PLAY
The world première of a new play by Michael John Garcés, about two sons seeking reconciliation with their dying father. Directed by Gia Forakis. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

ALL THE BAD THINGS
A developmental production for LAByrinth Theatre, written by Cusi Cram, about a married woman living with her husband and her mother in a minuscule West Village apartment. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200. Through March 5.)

BAREFOOT IN THE PARK
The heart—or Broadway's cardboard version of that easily bruised muscle—is given a tiresome workout in the first New York revival of Neil Simon's 1963 play, directed by Scott Elliott, at the Cort. The expertise of Simon's joke-writing is indubitable; the patriarchal attitudes beneath the romantic palaver here are insufferable. With Amanda Peet, Patrick Wilson, Jill Clayburgh, and Tony Roberts. (Reviewed in our issue of 2/27/06.) (138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

CLEAN ALTERNATIVES
An eco-friendly family does battle with corporate big business, in a comedy by Brian Dykstra. Directed by Margarett Perry. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

DEFIANCE
Manhattan Theatre Club presents John Patrick Shanley's new play, about racial tension on a North Carolina military base. Directed by Doug Hughes. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

FANNY HILL
What's surprising is that a musical based on the eighteenth-century English novel that James Boswell called "most licentious and inflaming" would yield so few frissons onstage. Ed Dixon's adaptation (with Nancy Anderson in the title role) is good-humored, tuneful, and proficient, but you could take your auntie from Alabama to see it without a blush. The soprano voices and curly wigs of the London ladies of pleasure bring to mind Walt Disney's ingénues (gone bad) rather than the hard-bitten Cockney schemers of John Gay's "Beggar's Opera." Still, the cast's comic smarts and sparkling voices help sell this pastel-hued tale of a country girl who trades her honor for an entrepreneurial interest in the boudoir. (St. Peter's Theatre, 54th St. east of Lexington Ave. 212-868-4444.)

I LOVE YOU BECAUSE
Austin (Colin Hanlon) is a greeting-card writer who (we are told) is straitlaced and unadventurous; he falls for Marcy (Farah Alvin), who (it is insisted) is funky and spontaneous. Since none of these qualities is ever much in evidence, the question becomes: can love between opposites succeed when neither party has any discernible personality? Stephanie D'Abruzzo, who plays Marcy's confidante, is known for her winning performance in "Avenue Q," a show that gave the romantic musical comedy a contemporary bite; this one, by Joshua Salzman and Ryan Cunningham, is pure formula. (Village, 158 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100.)

INDOOR/OUTDOOR
With her beguiling warble, Emily Cass McDonnell portrays Samantha, a runty kitten cast out by her owners, as an angst-ridden innocent desperate to be at first noticed, then loved, and, finally, understood. Rife with upbeat eighties music and set amidst a Crayola kaleidoscope of carpet, Kenny Finkle's energetic little comedy, cunningly directed by Daniel Goldstein, goes deeper than its initial feel-good sheen suggests. The humanization of the felines, including a naïve-tough-guy alley cat named Oscar (performed with preternatural vitality by Mario Campanaro), not only provides a model for human kindness but also plays directly to the suspicions of cat owners—that cats have feelings, too. (DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE LIEUTENANT OF INISHMORE
An Atlantic Theatre Company presentation of a black comedy by Martin McDonagh ("The Pillowman"), about a secluded terrorist in Galway who discovers that his cherished cat has been killed. (336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE PAJAMA GAME
Harry Connick, Jr., makes his Broadway début in a Roundabout Theatre Company revival of the 1954 musical. (Reviewed in this issue.) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

A PARSIFAL
The world première of Susan Sontag's gritty retelling of the Wagner opera. John Jahnke directs. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave. 212-352-3101. Through March 5.)

RED LIGHT WINTER
The sensational charmer Davis (played with wicked bravado by Gary Wilmes), who is the hypotenuse of the complex and compelling love triangle in Adam Rapp's new play (a Steppenwolf production at the Barrow Street), feeds off the deadness in others. His for-

mer college roommate, a bearded, insecure playwright named Matt (the superb, edgy Christopher Denham) offers Davis an emptiness that he can fill. The doe-eyed Christina (Lisa Joyce, making an effective New York début), a soi-disant French singer who turns out to be a "window whore" whom Davis picked up in Amsterdam's red-light district, exudes a sense of lostness in her pliancy. Rapp, who also directed, stages as cleverly as he writes; "Red Light Winter" is a demonstration of psychological imperialism that is at once thrilling and killing. (2/27/06) (27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200.)

RETZACH
A translation of Hanoch Levin's play, about the cycle of violence that unfolds when a father finds that his young son has been killed by soldiers in an occupied land. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

THE RIGHT KIND OF PEOPLE
The actor and writer Charles Grodin has concentrated some of his ugliest experiences on a Fifth Avenue co-op board into an agreeable but improbably sleepy satire, presented by Primary Stages, in which a similar group reveals its unease with "strange black men" riding the elevators and "garment district" Jews encroaching on its turf. Grodin makes his central point that élitism breeds bigotry, even in well-meaning people, bluntly at the outset but leaves it uncomplicated by the plot. Instead, he devotes the bulk of the play to the unprovocative infighting of the building's shareholders. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Through March 5.)

THE SEVEN
A new hip-hop musical by Will Power ("Flow"), an adaptation of Aeschylus' "Seven Against Thebes." (Reviewed in this issue.) (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

SOLDIER'S WIFE
The Mint Theatre Company presents Rose Franken's romantic comedy set during the Second World War, about a soldier returning home from the South Pacific to his newly self-sufficient wife. (311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231.)

[TITLE OF SHOW]
Jeff Bowen and Hunter Bell star in a musical they wrote about the writing of the musical. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

TRANSATLANTIC LIAISON
Simone de Beauvoir's affair with Nelson Algren is the subject of this new play by Fabrice Rozié. Directed by John McLean. (Harold Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE WOODEN BREEKS
Glen Berger's neo-Victorian play is the tale of Brood, an imaginary Scottish town that's conjured up by a lonely tinker, Bosch (Adam Rothenberg), and a young boy, Wicker (Jaymie Dornan), both of whom have been abandoned by the mysterious Hetty (Ana Reeder). Wicker's only connection to Hetty is through the heartsick Bosch, who can't resist spinning yarns of a melancholy town where Hetty reappears, involving all of Brood's inhabitants in a riddle with no apparent solution. The success of Berger's play, however, is no riddle: his knack for dialogue and storytelling is irresistible, and the result is full of Dickensian delight in human eccentricity. Directed by Trip Cullman. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

TABLES FOR TWO
PEACOCK ALLEY

301 Park Ave. (212-872-7335)—The Waldorf-Astoria has had a distinguished culinary history—a 1909 menu from the original Astor Hotel offered five different types of duck that varied not by preparation but by species. A later entry to the hotel's dining options, Peacock Alley has had several top chefs since it opened in 1961, including Laurent Gras, whose terrific menu was so eccentric that he retreated to California for three years after the Waldorf closed the place, in 2001. The management's idea for a revamp was to demolish the ovoid room lined with peacock murals; the restaurant, which reopened last November, is now part of the Art Deco lobby. One recent evening, an old gent wearing a raincoat over his tweed suit sat in a club chair reading the *Wall Street Journal*, folded back and held close as if he were on a crowded subway. A woman played what sounded like a ragtime arrangement of "Desperado" on a grand piano. Among the jabbering hotel guests, someone in a tuxedo asked for directions to the rest rooms. With all the racket, it might as well have been a Greyhound-station waiting room.

The distractions are unfortunate, because the new chef, Cedric Tovar, serves food that merits undivided attention. There are pointed notes of invention, like the poached egg and black truffle, which comes as a bubbling foam in a miniature Le Creuset saucepan, and Belon oysters, studded with black pepper and green apple. Then there's the deep pleasure of the braised pork cheeks with *garganelli* pasta and a *guanciale*-and-Parmesan emulsion. The menu features only one duck, but it's a fine specimen from Long Island, served with braised baby turnips. Some entrées emphasize hearty proportions over innovation but make up for it with a provocative side dish. The aged sirloin, for example, is married to both a short-rib compote and a cauliflower-and-bone-marrow salad.

However noisy the lobby, the restaurant manages to preserve a sense of unhurriedness. Dinner stretched to two and half hours—the esoteric list of dessert wines by the glass and a quark cheesecake with a gingerbread crust were worth lingering over. Meanwhile, the old guy was still in his chair folding his way through the financial tables. (Open weekdays for lunch and dinner and weekends for dinner. Entrées $26-$38.)

—*Owen Phillips*

Also Playing

ABIGAIL'S PARTY: Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BACK OF THE THROAT:** 41 White St. 212-352-3101. Through March 8. **BRIDGE & TUNNEL:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **CHICAGO:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **THE COLOR PURPLE:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **CONFESSIONS OF A MORMON BOY:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555. **DIRTY ROTTEN SCOUNDRELS:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **DOUBT:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **THE LIGHT IN THE PIAZZA:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **RABBIT HOLE:** Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **SWEENEY TODD:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **THE TRIP TO BOUNTIFUL:** Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529. **THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE:** Circle in the Square, 50th St. between Broadway and Eighth Ave. 212-239-6200. **WICKED:** Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100. **ZOMBOID! (FILM/PERFORMANCE PROJECT #1):** St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-352-3101.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—March 1: The California punk group **NOFX**'s new album, "Never Trust a Hippie," continues the band's proud tradition of writing irreverent songs and displaying an independent spirit. March 3: The Kingston, Jamaica, native **Gregory Isaacs**. March 4: Roots rock meets Irish folk as Dublin's **Hothouse Flowers** take the stage.

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BEACON THEATRE

Broadway at 74th St. (212-307-7171)—March 4: The blue-eyed soul of **Daryl Hall** and **John Oates.** March 7: **Donald Fagen,** whose devilish vocal style gave life to the sophisticated songs of the jazz-rock institution Steely Dan and whose solo work is equally rife with acerbic lyrics and impeccable musicianship. He's here with material from "Morph the Cat," his first solo album in a dozen years.

BOWERY BALLROOM

6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—March 2: **KT Tunstall** has had a record year, but she's no overnight success. The U.K. folk-pop sensation nearly signed with Tommy Mottola at Columbia Records in 2002, but he left the label before the deal was completed. She was stuck with no label and no prospects, but her luck changed two years ago, when she was a last-minute replacement for the rapper Nas on the BBC's "Later with Jools Holland." She delivered a commanding performance and put out an album, "Eye to the Telescope," and the rest was history. She looks to extend her reach to this country with the recent release here of "Eye," and the early returns are favorable. It débuted at No. 47 on the charts. March 7: The **Subways,** a disarmingly youthful British trio made up of two brothers and their childhood friend. The guitarist and singer Billy Lunn started playing rock and roll after seeing Oasis on television at home. His brother, the drummer Josh Morgan, took to his instrument after his parents provided him with a drum kit. The Subways, who favor plaintive guitar-driven songs, have since conquered the U.K. press and are on the brink of indie-rock stardom here: they've appeared on the prime-time drama "The O.C.," following the likes of Death Cab for Cutie, the Killers, and Modest Mouse.

HAMMERSTEIN BALLROOM

Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. (212-307-7171)—March 1 and March 3-4: The **Strokes** helped put New York City back on the rock and roll map in 2001 with their début, "Is This It." The pressure may be on for them to reclaim their spot as the city's premier band following the tepid reception of their second album, "Room on Fire," but the privileged boys sound loose and carefree on "First Impressions of Earth," their uneven new release. March 7: **Matisyahu,** a local Hasid who combines hip-hop and roots reggae, and **Balkan Beat Box,** the shifting ensemble led by the percussionist Tamir Muskat and the saxophonist Ori Kaplan.

JOE'S PUB

425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—March 3: The guillotine-sharp singer-songwriter **Amy Rigby,** a former postmodern girl grouper (the Shams) and cowpunk (the East Village hillbilly band the Last Roundup), chronicled single motherhood nearly a decade ago on her solo début, "Diary of a Mod Housewife." Her latest, and fifth album, "Little Fugitive," finds her embracing middle age with her trademark wit, comparing herself to Rasputin on one song (as an example of her resiliency) and rhyming "croque monsieur" with "working poor" on another. She's touring with **Marti Jones,** a sharp-eyed jangle-rock survivor (her husband is the producer Don Dixon). March 4: **Martin Hayes** and **Dennis Cahill** present the finest in Irish fiddling and guitar work. March 7: The **Wood Brothers** are Chris, the bass player from Medeski Martin & Wood, and Oliver, a guitar-toting Southern rocker. Together they strum, pick, and sing their way through the back country.

MERCURY LOUNGE

217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—March 4: New Jersey's **Satanicide** lovingly exhumes the silliest elements of eighties heavy metal. The leather-clad quartet smears the boundary between parody and tribute more liberally than Gene Simmons applies cheap black lipstick. March 6: The long-running San Diego-based band **Gogogo Airheart** mixes dub reggae, post-punk, and half a dozen other genres (à la the Futureheads). They're headlining a tour organized by Mars Volta that also features their labelmates **Subtitle,** a seven-foot-tall underground rapper from L.A. (whose real name is Giovanni Marks) and the **Jai-Alai Savant,** a trio that mixes reggae and punk into a potent cocktail.

NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE

Broadway at 44th St. (212-307-7171)—March 1: South Boston's **Dropkick Murphys,** favorites of the thick-necked, tattooed set, play testosterone-rich punk rock with Irish roots. The following nights, March 2-3, expect a sweater-and-glasses-wearing crowd for the retro sounds of Scotland's **Belle and Sebastian.** Let's hope the two groups of fans don't meet. With Vancouver's **New Pornographers,** specialists in perfectly crafted power pop.

WARSAW

261 Driggs Ave., Brooklyn (718-387-0505)—March 2: The glistening global electro-pop of New York's own **Brazilian Girls,** none of whom, by the way, are Brazilian (they're from Italy, Argentina, and the U.S.), and only one of whom is a woman.

The singer-songwriter Amy Rigby visits Joe's Pub.

LARA TOMLIN

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE

March 1: The globe-trotting drummer **Glen Velez** and **Lori Cotler,** a vocalist with mystically percussive ways, team up at Symphony Space. (Broadway at 95th St.) March 4: A belated Mardi Gras celebration with New York's veteran gospel brass band **McCollough Sons of Thunder** and **Coolbone,** an energetic young marching band from New Orleans. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St.) March 5: A "Masters of Persian Music" show with a stellar Iranian lineup—the vocalist **Mohammad Reza Shajarian,** the tar (lute) virtuoso **Hossein Alizadeh,** and **Kayhan Kalhor,** a master of the *kamancheh* (spike fiddle). They will also be joined by Shajarian's son, **Homayoun Shajarian,** on *tombak* (drum) and vocals. (Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center. For more information about all the shows, call 212-545-7536.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND

315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—March 1-4: The pianist **Andrew Hill** is a noted iconoclast whose Blue Note classics from the sixties retain their power and mystery. Hill recently returned to the label more than a decade after he last recorded for it. His band features the trumpeter **Charles Tolliver** and the saxophonist **Greg Tardy,** the main horn protagonists on Hill's characteristically flinty yet lyrical new release, "Time Lines."

BLUE NOTE

131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—March 2-5: Latin jazz is all the rage again, but the master *conguero* **Poncho Sanchez** and his steaming Latin Jazz Ensemble held the torch high during the leaner years, and their commitment to hot swing has yet to let up.

CARLYLE HOTEL

Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound murals, and, through April 1, **Barbara Cook.**

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA

Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Feb. 28-March 5: **Cyrus Chestnut,** a soulful, virtuosic piano player, makes room in his quintet for the skilled guitarist **Mark Whitfield.**

IRIDIUM

1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—March 2-5: The members of the Four Generations of Miles band—**Mike Stern, George Coleman, Buster Williams,** and **Jimmy Cobb**—may never have actually played together in Davis's groups, but they all share modal-bop agility and a lingering love for the Master's music. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ STANDARD

116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—**Steve Nelson** is a vibraphonist and marimba player with plenty to say, as his work with Dave Holland's bands proves. On March 1-5 his quintet includes the pianist **Mulgrew Miller** and the saxophonist **Donald Harrison.**

RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL

Sixth Ave. at 50th St. (212-247-4777)—March 4: **Michael Bublé,** a processed vocal superstar from Canada, plays the grand Art Deco hall. Frank Sinatra has never been more sorely missed.

TRIBECA PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

199 Chambers St.—The German-born composer Kurt Weill, a classically trained cantor's son who immigrated to this country in 1935, transformed musical theatre on both sides of the Atlantic. He collaborated on dark social and political operas with Bertolt Brecht and on popular Broadway musicals with Ira Gershwin ("Lady in the Dark") and Langston Hughes ("Street Scene"). A revival of his "Threepenny Opera" is currently running on the Great White Way. On March 4, the pianist **Anthony Coleman** and friends (including **Shelley Hirsh, Chocolate Genius, Elysian Fields,** the **Main Squeeze Orchestra,** and **Sanda Weigl**) pay a belated birthday homage to the modernist master. (For more information, call 212-601-1000.)

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Feb. 28-March 5: **Fred Hersch.** A week after the release of his solo album, "Fred Hersch in Amsterdam: Live at the Bimhuis," the pianist performs at the Vanguard, all by himself, marking the first time a lone pianist has played an extended engagement at the venerable club. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Robert Rauschenberg: Combines."** A majestic, exhilarating show of painting-sculpture hybrids dating from the fifties and early sixties. Through April 2. ♦ The small but notable exhibition **"Antonello da Messina: Sici-**

ly's Renaissance Master" includes his "Virgin Annunciate," which is, by itself, worth a trip to the museum. Depicted in the seconds before the angel Gabriel comes into view, Mary (here a young Sicilian girl in a blue mantle) looks up from her book and raises one hesitant hand as if trying to place the sound of a rustling robe or beating wings. It is a quiet but miraculous image, capturing the fragility and ordinariness of a girl still untouched by the strangeness of the scene to come. The rest of the show consists of fewer than a dozen paintings and drawings, among them a portrait of a slyly smiling merchant that places Antonello in the middle of the dovetailing Netherlandish and Italian traditions. Through March 5. ♦ **"Pearls of the Parrot of India: The Emperor Akbar's Illustrated 'Khamsa,' 1597-98."** Manuscripts of the Sufi poet Amir Khusrau Dihlavi's five-tale "Khamsa," currently unbound for conservation, are illustrated with vibrant landscapes, theatrical figures, and intricately drawn *shamsa* rosettes, best seen through a magnifying glass. Through March 12. ♦ **"Santiago Calatrava: Sculpture Into Architecture."** Through March 5. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"In-Depth: The House of Spiritual Retreat by Emilio Ambasz"** examines a house that was built last year in Spain, more than twenty years after it was first designed for an imaginary site. Through March 6. ♦ The retrospective **"John Szarkowski: Photographs."** Through May 15. ♦ **"Edvard Munch: The Modern Life of the Soul"** is the first American museum retrospective of the Norwegian artist (1863-1944) in thirty years. Through May 8. ♦ **"On-Site: New Architecture in Spain,"** a survey of fifty-three recent or planned architectural projects. Through May 1. ♦ A survey of contemporary art from around the world, **"Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking"** cants toward work by artists from Islamic societies, though its aim is to demonstrate how assumptions based on geography can be misleading. Through May 22. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"David Smith: A Centennial."** Through May 14. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—The 2006 Biennial opens this week, and for the first time in its history the survey of contemporary art will have a title: **"Day for Night,"** after the 1973 Truffaut film. There are more than a hundred artists represented in this year's show, among them Marilyn Minter, Peter Doig, Adam McEwan, Anne Collier, Kenneth Anger, and Robert Gober. Opens March 2. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM AT ALTRIA

120 Park Ave., at 42nd St. (917-663-2453)—**"Andrea Zittel: Small Liberties."** Concurrent with the New Museum's retrospective, the Whitney presents a selection of customized "Wagon Stations" made at Zittel's A-Z West project in the desert near Joshua Tree, California. (Open Mondays through Fridays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 7:30.)

FRICK COLLECTION

1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Goya's Last Works."** Through May 14. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—In 1860, the prospering painter Frederic Church bought two hundred and fifty acres in upstate New York, and—collaborating with the architect Calvert Vaux—designed the quintessential Hudson River School estate. He named it Olana, after an archaic Persian term meaning "storehouse of treasure," and filled it with romantic vistas he had travelled the world to paint. **"Treasures from Olana: Landscapes by Frederic Edwin Church"** presents a selection of highly finished oil sketches from the estate's collection, and their crystalline detail and luminous palette make travel photography seem gauche and uninspired. The Parthenon, the El Khasné temple at Petra, Mt. Chimborazo, in Ecuador, and Niagara's Horseshoe Falls glitter in miniature, less majestic than Church's monumental finished works, but still magical. Through April 30. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Temporarily located in the Chelsea Art Museum, 556 W. 22nd St. (212-219-1222)—**"Andrea Zittel: Critical Space."** Through April 29. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, noon to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER

22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—There isn't much competition for mastery of the "nouvelle whittling" category in art. But if there were, few could touch **Ricky Swallow.** He can apparently carve anything out of wood—examples here include a life-size skeleton; a minutely accurate bike helmet through whose vents twine snakes; and a full-scale replica of a family dinner table remembered from his childhood, spread with oysters, lobsters, and other fruits of the sea (Swallow's father is a fisherman in Melbourne, Australia). Perhaps the gentle surrealism of these objects is not entirely fascinating as sculpture. But the skill involved in making them is amazing. Through March 20. ♦ **"Jessica Rankin: The Measure of Every Pause."** Through May 1. ♦ **"Peter Hujar."** Through March 6. ♦ **"Jessica Stockholder: Of Standing Float Roots in Thin Air."** Through May 1. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM

144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"Frequency,"** work by a selection of up-and-coming black artists active in the U.S. Through March 12. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6; Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

MARIA ELENA GONZÁLEZ

González's childhood in Cuba and Catholic upbringing are drawn upon in works that fuse relics, martyrdom, and an exile's longing for home. The debt to post-minimalist artists like Eva Hesse is obvious, but González's works are imbued with a referential poignancy left out by earlier practitioners. Nine red models on pedestals are obscured by frosted Plexiglas covers, like dwellings that have become visually fogged over by memory. Delicate ink-jet prints remake instruments of torture, like the Catherine wheel and the rack, into careful studies of structure and architecture. The effect is to breathe new life into the relationship between art, religion, and the body. Through March 4. (Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. 212-794-0550.)

AGNES MARTIN

One of the first exhibitions of Martin's paintings since her death, in 2004, shows her career as cyclical rather than linear. Canvases with her signature reductive grids and registers, painted in the late fifties (she destroyed all work created before 1957), hang next to more recent efforts; the results are often barely distinguishable. Two silver-and-black canvases from 1960 and 2004, respectively, set up relationships with the horizon line, with singular circles and squares hovering above and below it. Other pairs feature lines scored into the paint or washes of pastel color that conjure the Western desert where she lived. Even her titles bear a poetic simplicity and consistency, from the early "Wheat" and "The River" to late works like "Gratitude" and "Happiness." Through March 4. (PaceWildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 212-421-3292.)

PINO PASCALI

Pascali (1935-68) is little known in this country, but his work arrives with helpful tags: Arte Povera, post-minimalist. Some of it veers toward comedy, like the sculptures of shark fins rising up from the floor. Other pieces take a more serious sixties formalist tack, like the twenty-two squat steel trays filled with dyed water, which mix minimalist industrialism with aquatic immateriality. Handmade "weapons" offer a mute salute to military objects while denying their deadly function; a bridge made of braided steel wool looks simi-

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
FAMILY OBSERVATIONS

Like writing, photography is often an autobiographical medium—a way of recording, illuminating, and interpreting your life. Long before Nan Goldin began her bracingly candid visual diary, influential modernists like Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Weston, and Imogen Cunningham were making pictures of their families, friends, and lovers, and countless photographers from Sally Mann to Ryan McGinley continue to tweak the tradition. No matter how frank, the autobiographical photo always involves a delicate balance of truth and fiction, artlessness and art. Tracey Baran's latest pictures, at Leslie Tonkonow's Chelsea gallery, continue a narrative that she began in 1998, with a series of family images that blurred the line between staged and spontaneous moments. Her work, always great to look at, has become sexier and more assured since then, but it still thrives on this confusion. Baran telegraphs the fraught nuances of relationships—with her father, a female friend, or a lover who's no more than a hand cupping her face on a couch—so efficiently that her pictures feel like epigrams, terse and telling.

—*Vince Aletti*

TRACEY BARAN

larly suspect. Somewhere in all this one catches a glimmer of the Italian trickster, a tradition running from Boccaccio through commedia dell'arte and into the work of the contemporary artist Maurizio Cattelan. Through March 11. (Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave. 212-744-2313.)

FRANCIS PICABIA
An active Dadaist and Surrealist, Picabia (1879-1953) also had a taste for kitsch and a Picasso hangover that rears its head repeatedly in these works on paper. Dark, doe-eyed women wearing mantillas recall Balthus's beauties while frolicking bathers and athletes conjure, simultaneously, Picasso's early obsession with itinerant circus folk (the saltimbanques) and his post-First World War regression to Classicism. A few Cubist experiments turn up among the largely figurative fare, but a viewer unfamiliar with Picabia might easily mistake all this as the work of a famous fashion illustrator rather than a modern aesthetic insurgent. Through April 15. (Michael Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623.)

VICTOR SCHRAGER
Schrager's photographs of books are not for bibliophiles only. Stripped of their covers and arranged upright, the books become architectural planes—walls, towers, monoliths—and slabs of color in abstract space. Think Malevich meets Luis Barragán, but in dreamy soft focus. Rendered as pigment prints on textured watercolor paper, Schrager's tabletop still-lifes become post-modern color-field compositions, their rich, unexpected hues tart enough to taste. Through March 4. (Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-750-7070.)

Short List

ERIC FISCHL: Yoshii, 17 E. 76th St. 212-744-5550. Through March 18. **AGNES MARTIN:** PaceWildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 212-421-3292. Through March 4. **ALEXEY TITARENKO / PENTTI SAMMALLAHTI:** Nailya Alexander and Candace Dwan, 24 W. 57th St. 212-315-2211. Through March 25.

GALLERIES–CHELSEA

ANGELO FILOMENO
The peacock's influence on art has waned considerably since the Middle Ages. Filomeno resurrects it with full, exquisitely gaudy grandeur. Wall hangings made of embroidered silk and gold lamé and tableaux fashioned from cascading crystals, mirrors, and stuffed birds look like School of Liberace interior-design projects; a carefully lit display of three silk knight's helmets, festooned with feathers and hung from the ceiling, offers an object lesson in resurrected pageantry. The oddest thing is that Filomeno's love of silk and baubles registers as surprisingly—and unfashionably—reverent rather than ironic. Through March 11. (Boesky, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9889.)

KAREN FINLEY
The most celebrated member of the N.E.A. Four—the performance artists whose federal-grant denials sparked the culture wars of the early nineties—continues her campaign of provocation with "George and Martha," a series of drawings chronicling an imaginary affair between Martha Stewart and the President. Finley's fantasy finds the "Patron Saint of cooks and servants" offering stuffed-cabbage recipes, Handi Wipes, and sexual favors. W. is a less drawn, less colorful figure, represented by an eagle and a bag of cocaine. Two hundred small sketches executed with rococo-style flourishes provide ample chuckles, although this show doesn't possess anywhere near the searing power of her performances. Despite the diminutive, low-pitched format, Finley gets in a few good digs. Through March 18. (Gray Kapernekas, 626 W. 26th St. 212-462-4150.)

SEYDOU KEITA
Keita, who died in 2001, was a self-taught photographer who ran a successful portrait studio in Bamako, Mali, from 1949 until his retirement, in 1977. "Discovered" by collectors in the late nineties, Keita's black-and-white portraits were compared to August Sander's and Irving Penn's, and they only look better with time. The subjects of this group of recent prints are nearly all women and children, often in groups that emphasize the clashing patterns of their dresses and the background drapery. The work is at once plainspoken and sophisticated, simply descriptive and full of warmth: a lesson in flair, restraint, and generosity. Through March 4. (Sean Kelly, 528 W. 29th St. 212-239-1181.)

Short List

TRACEY BARAN: Tonkonow, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-255-8450. Through March 4. **ALEXANDER CALDER:** PaceWildenstein, 545 W. 22nd St. 212-989-4258. Through March 4. **ALFREDO JAAR:** Lelong, 528 W. 26th St. 212-315-0470. Through March 18. **MATT MULLICAN:** Burgin, 243 W. 18th St. 212-462-2668. Through March 11. **MARVIN E. NEWMAN:** Silverstein, 535 W. 24th St. 212-627-3930. Through March 11. **LES ROGERS:** Koenig, 545 W. 23rd St. 212-334-9255. Through March 4.

GALLERIES–BROOKLYN

"UNMODERN OBSERVATIONS"
The art works here might not fit their adjective—does low-tech melancholia equal nonmodernity? As observations, however, they evince a fragile grace. Rashawn Griffin's casual sketch of one hipster guy comforted by another is captioned "Come on, man"—this makes an intuitive diptych with Griffin's video of a wandering monster made from black trash bags. Ronnie Bass and Tommy Hartung have collaborated on another rather touching video, depicting a plaster-dusted man carefully unburying and then reburying himself in a pile of rubble. Martin Ake Smith's photograph of an elegant dinner table bespattered with what one hopes is chocolate keeps things from getting precious. Through March 5. (Southfirst, 60 N. 6th St. 718-599-4884.)

DANCE

PAUL TAYLOR DANCE COMPANY
Even the ordinarily tight-lipped Paul Taylor admits that "Banquet of Vultures," which has its New York première this week at City Center, is an antiwar piece. But true to form, Taylor works with the surreal dark energy of Goya, not the realism of CNN. While the eye strains to make out hooded figures in the darkness, soldiers dart across the stage, clutching puny, inadequate candles. In the potent, climactic duet, a jerking, alien man in a suit (Michael Trusnovec) corners a crouching, all-too-human girl in fatigues (Julie Tice); her second-to-second survival gambits play out in terrifying detail. Other highlights of the season's first week include the new "Spring Rounds" and the first New York revival in two decades of Taylor's 1965 satire of American icons, "From Sea to Shining Sea." (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. March 1-3 at 8, March 4 at 2 and 8, March 5 at 3, and March 7 at 7. Through March 19.)

IVY BALDWIN DANCE / KATE WEARE
With her chiselled cheekbones and stately carriage, Kate Weare has a natural authority, which she puts to use in her new piece "Wet Road." Weare, like a bright-eyed Athena, functions as a distant, skeptical observer who intervenes periodically in the dynamics of two couples, who work out their earthly desires and struggles with pushing, pulling, limb-trapping, and tango-inflected kicks. Ivy Baldwin's "Gone Missing" is a Slavic-inspired fairy tale constructed out of secrets whispered in Russian, the vocalized sounds of wind and crackling ice, and stirring images, such as when two dancers sing a Russian folk song as they stand on the backs of two figures on all fours who sway like boats crossing a river. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. March 1-4 at 7:30.)

DANCEBRAZIL
"Desafio," the Portuguese word for "challenge," is the title of an unusually dark new work by the troupe's artistic director, Jelon Vieira. Or at least a work that begins darkly, with the dancers struggling, and ends in a more characteristic celebration. The piece draws on Vieira's own trials in keeping a com-

POP NOTES
SINGLES GOING STEADY

James Blunt has certainly known conflict—he was a member of the British Army and served in Kosovo—but now, as a singer and songwriter, he goes out of his way to avoid conflict, tension, or any other kind of distinguishing energy. His repetitive and well-mannered ballad **"You're Beautiful"** is creeping toward the top of the American charts as part of its obligatory life as a song before it becomes the perfume commercial it was born to be. Blunt's assets, if you can call them that, are a weak falsetto and a fearless decision to include the word "fucking" in this under-annotated composition about seeing a woman once and falling in love. It happens, sure, but Blunt's description of the fateful moment is as banal as the music: a Starbucks-friendly quilt of nylon-string classical guitar, mandolin, neutered drums, and a timid, depressive chord sequence. Those of us old enough to remember England Dan and John Ford Coley miss them terribly.

Though Prince may never again approach the astonishing levels of his eighties work, he is still capable of felicitous surprises. **"Black Sweat,"** the second single from his forthcoming album, "3121," is one of them. Reaching back to "Kiss," at least, Prince takes a foundation of James Brown funk, strips it down, and deforms it brilliantly. The music is reduced to a sharp drum pattern with a very loud high hat, a keening keyboard line, and falsetto vocals. The words depict Prince in a bind: "I don't want to take my clothes off—but I do." Prince, bravely, confronts this ambivalence and accepts that he has "a job to do." The title is a subtle jab at anyone who wants to whiten Prince's musical lineage, and the song is sharp enough to stand alongside those produced by the current keepers of the funk.

What are you looking at when you look inside a rapper's mouth and see, instead of teeth, gems? It's a grill, an impression of one's teeth rendered in precious metal and inlaid with diamonds and other precious stones. Nelly, the perennially popular artist from St. Louis who has happily never decided whether he's singing or rapping, is enjoying a hit with **"Grillz,"** a song almost entirely about the fabulous dental appliance. He collaborates on the song with Paul Wall, a Houston rapper whose other business is the actual making and selling of grills. The music here, by Jermaine Dupri, is minimal, simply a backdrop for the jokes about the paradoxical pleasures of spending thousands of dollars on an accessory that spends most of its time in the dark: "If I can call it a drink, call it a Smile on the Rocks. / If I can call out a price, let's say I call out 'a lot.'"

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

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✓ pack for vacation
✓ get tires checked
ask doctor about arthritis

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Medication Guide for Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs)

(See the end of this Medication Guide for a list of prescription NSAID medicines.)

What is the most important information I should know about medicines called Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs)?

NSAID medicines may increase the chance of a heart attack or stroke that can lead to death.

This chance increases:

- with longer use of NSAID medicines
- in people who have heart disease

NSAID medicines should never be used right before or after a heart surgery called a "coronary artery bypass graft (CABG)."

NSAID medicines can cause ulcers and bleeding in the stomach and intestines at any time during treatment. Ulcers and bleeding:

- can happen without warning symptoms
- may cause death

The chance of a person getting an ulcer or bleeding increases with:

- taking medicines called "corticosteroids" and "anticoagulants"
- longer use
- smoking
- drinking alcohol
- older age
- having poor health

NSAID medicines should only be used:

- exactly as prescribed
- at the lowest dose possible for your treatment
- for the shortest time needed

What are Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs)?

NSAID medicines are used to treat pain and redness, swelling, and heat (inflammation) from medical conditions such as:

- different types of arthritis
- menstrual cramps and other types of short-term pain

Who should not take a Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drug (NSAID)?

Do not take an NSAID medicine:

- if you had an asthma attack, hives, or other allergic reaction with aspirin or any other NSAID medicine
- for pain right before or after heart bypass surgery

Tell your healthcare provider:

- about all of your medical conditions.
- about all of the medicines you take. NSAIDs and some other medicines can interact with each other and cause serious side effects. **Keep a list of your medicines to show to your health care provider and pharmacist.**
- if you are pregnant. **NSAID medicines should not be used by pregnant women late in their pregnancy.**
- if you are breastfeeding. **Talk to your doctor.**

What are the possible side effects of Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs)?

Serious side effects include:

- heart attack
- stroke
- high blood pressure
- heart failure from body swelling (fluid retention)
- kidney problems including kidney failure
- bleeding and ulcers in the stomach and intestine
- low red blood cells (anemia)
- life-threatening skin reactions
- life-threatening allergic reactions
- liver problems including liver failure
- asthma attacks in people who have asthma

Other side effects include:

- stomach pain
- constipation
- diarrhea
- gas
- heartburn
- nausea
- vomiting
- dizziness

Get emergency help right away if you have any of the following symptoms:

- shortness of breath or trouble breathing
- chest pain
- weakness in one part or side of your body
- slurred speech
- swelling of the face or throat

Stop your NSAID medicine and call your healthcare provider right away if you have any of the following symptoms:

- nausea
- more tired or weaker than usual
- itching
- your skin or eyes look yellow
- stomach pain
- flu-like symptoms
- vomit blood
- there is blood in your bowel movement or it is black and sticky like tar
- skin rash or blisters with fever
- unusual weight gain
- swelling of the arms and legs, hands and feet

These are not all the side effects with NSAID medicines. Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist for more information about NSAID medicines.

Other information about Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs)

- Aspirin is an NSAID medicine but it does not increase the chance of a heart attack. Aspirin can cause bleeding in the brain, stomach, and intestines. Aspirin can also cause ulcers in the stomach and intestines.
- Some of these NSAID medicines are sold in lower doses without a prescription (over-the-counter). Talk to your healthcare provider before using over-the-counter NSAIDs for more than 10 days.

NSAID medicines that need a prescription

Generic Name	Tradename
Celecoxib	Celebrex
Diclofenac	Cataflam, Voltaren, Arthrotec (combined with misoprostol)
Diflunisal	Dolobid
Etodolac	Lodine, Lodine XL
Fenoprofen	Nalfon, Nalfon 200
Flurbiprofen	Ansaid
Ibuprofen	Motrin, Tab-Profen, Vicoprofen (combined with hydrocodone), Combunox (combined with oxycodone)
Indomethacin	Indocin, Indocin SR, Indo-Lemmon, Indomethagan
Ketoprofen	Oruvail
Ketorolac	Toradol
Mefenamic Acid	Ponstel
Meloxicam	Mobic
Nabumetone	Relafen
Naproxen	Naprosyn, Anaprox, Anaprox DS, EC-Naproxyn, Naprelan, Naprapac (copackaged with lansoprazole)
Oxaprozin	Daypro
Piroxicam	Feldene
Sulindac	Clinoril
Tolmetin	Tolectin, Tolectin DS, Tolectin 600

This Medication Guide has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

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Firestone
TELEPHONE
TEXA

"Untitled (People on Street)," from 1955, by Marvin E. Newman, at Silverstein.

pany together and on interviews with his dancers, but it also derives from the challenge format of capoeira, of which Vieira is a *mestre.* "Desafio" shares a program with last year's "Retratos da Bahia." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. Feb. 28 at 7:30, March 1-4 at 8, March 5 at 2 and 7:30, and March 7 at 8. Through March 12.)

HEADLONG DANCE THEATRE
The 92nd Street Y Harkness Dance Festival continues with "Mixed Tape for a Bad Year," a collection of works created in a disaster-laden 2005. In the mournful "Yonder," set to murder ballads and folk songs recorded by Alan Lomax, sweet courting dances go fatally wrong, and tombstones accumulate. The slight absurdity of those grim objects gives way to outright silliness in "Hippie Elegy," during which hilariously dorky music visualization to Joni Mitchell songs alternates with less effective elegies for a simpler time. Finally, the video "Thrash" documents what happened when company members and previous audiences were asked to react physically to speeches by President Bush. (Ailey Theatre, 405 W. 55th St. 212-415-5500. March 1-2 and March 4 at 8 and March 5 at 2 and 7.)

"THOUSAND YEARS WAITING"
The Japanese-born choreographer-director Sonoko Kawahara and the Japanese-American playwright Chiori Miyagawa explore the nature of storytelling in a dance-theatre piece built around the near-extinct form of Otome Bunraku, which features a female puppeteer. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave. 212-352-3101. March 1-3 at 8, March 4 at 4:30 and 8, and March 5 at 4:30. Through March 12.)

PAPPA TARAHUMARA
This internationally acclaimed, multidisciplinary Japanese collective, now making its New York début, takes its name from an Antonin Artaud essay about a native tribe in Mexico. That origin accurately suggests the atmosphere of the troupe's productions: theatrical environments where meaning is something from which to be liberated. Though the company is known for fanciful props, "Island" is spare and intimate. A dangling light bulb falls and rises as a man and a woman sing, squeal, growl, speak, run, collapse, and flap their arms, seeming at times hopelessly isolated, then merging or switching roles. (Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St. 212-715-1258. March 2-3 at 7:30.)

"SANS"
The Parisian choreographer Martine Pisani's string of skits feels like a postmodern dance made by Mr. Bean: cheerfully absurd. Sans music, sans scenery, three average guys in street clothes step and stumble with intense, arresting awkwardness. The squirming Everymen play through well-timed bits both comic and surreal, generating their own sounds along the way: singing, talking, stomping, and laughing. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 212-242-0800. March 2-3 at 8, March 4 at 7 and 10, and March 5 at 8.)

NEW YORK THEATRE BALLET
The chamber-ballet company performs "The Alice-in-Wonderland Follies," a series of vignettes from Lewis Carroll's tale, conceived by the choreographer Keith Michael as a ballet-vaudeville revue, complete with slapstick stunts (done by the neo-vaudevillians Dan Renkin and Joey Stocks), clever sets by Gillian Bradshaw-Smith, and a dreamy pas de deux for Alice (Danielle Genest) and a rather dashing White Rabbit (Steven Melendez). (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 212-307-4100. March 3 at 10 A.M., noon, and 7:30 and March 4-5 at 11 A.M., 1, and 3:30.)

PEGGY SPINA TAP COMPANY
The tap company concludes its run. (Spina Loft, 115 Prince St. 212-674-8885. March 3 at 8 and March 4 at 6 and 8:30.)

PHILADANCO
The African-American dance troupe from Philadelphia reprises three works that received their New York premières at the Joyce last fall, as well as a 2002 piece by the former Ailey dancer Christopher Huggins, "Enemy Behind the Gates." "Between Earth and Home," by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar (the founder of the Urban Bush Women), is a parable of social exclusion set among a flock of birds. In "For Mother," Afro-Cuban rhythms lead Ronald K. Brown, whose own company recently ended a successful run at the Joyce, into a characteristic exploration of African, Caribbean, and African-American dance forms. (Queens Theatre in the Park, Flushing Meadows Corona Park, Queens. 718-760-0064. March 4 at 2 and 8 and March 5 at 3.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
March 1 at 8 and March 4 at 1:30: The wonderful Natalie Dessay returns in Gounod's **"Roméo et Juliette"** with her original Roméo, the impeccable Ramón Vargas. Bertrand de Billy, a master of French style, leads a crisp and telling accompaniment. ♦ March 2 at 8: The mezzo-soprano Olga Borodina lends her regal voice to the Met's colorful production of **"Samson et Dalila,"** joining the tenor Jon Frederic West in the title roles; Emmanuel Villaume conducts. (This is the final performance.) ♦ March 3 at 8: **"La Traviata,"** with Angela Gheorghiu, José Luis Duval, and Anthony Michaels-Moore; Marco Armiliato. ♦ March 4 and March 7 at 8: A first-rate cast transcends the Met's lugubrious production of **"La Forza del Destino,"** Verdi's sprawling vision of a world on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Deborah Voigt, handling her soaring lines with confidence and style, has her greatest Verdian success to date as Leonora; the quirky Salvatore Licitra eventually delivers as Alvaro; and Mark Delavan's polished Don Carlo enhances his reputation as America's next great baritone. Also with excellent performances by Juan Pons, Samuel Ramey, and Ildikó Komlósi, whose hip-swinging stage antics, as Preziosilla, do not overshadow her rich and agile voice. Gianandrea Noseda, a protégé of the conductor Valery Gergiev, brings out the best in the orchestra and chorus. ♦ March 6 at 8: The Met's long association with Valery Gergiev has offered audiences a number of exciting Russian novelties. The latest is Tchaikovsky's **"Mazeppa,"** a surprisingly intimate opera (based on a Pushkin poem) about a treacherous Cossack chieftain. Rarely performed outside Russia, it features a cast headed by Olga Guryakova, Larissa Diadkova, Nikolai Putilin, and Paata Burchuladze. (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA
Frank Loesser, whose classical-music family looked down on him for writing for Broadway, never reached higher than in **"The Most Happy Fella,"** a quasi-operatic "musical with a lot of music" about an aging Napa Valley vintner who is hopelessly in love with a beautiful young waitress. Paul Sorvino and Lisa Vroman take the leading roles in a staging conducted by George Manahan. (Preview performances are offered on March 4 at 8 and March 5 at 1:30, with an opening-night gala on March 7 at 6:30. Through March 25.) (New York State Theatre. 212-721-6500.)

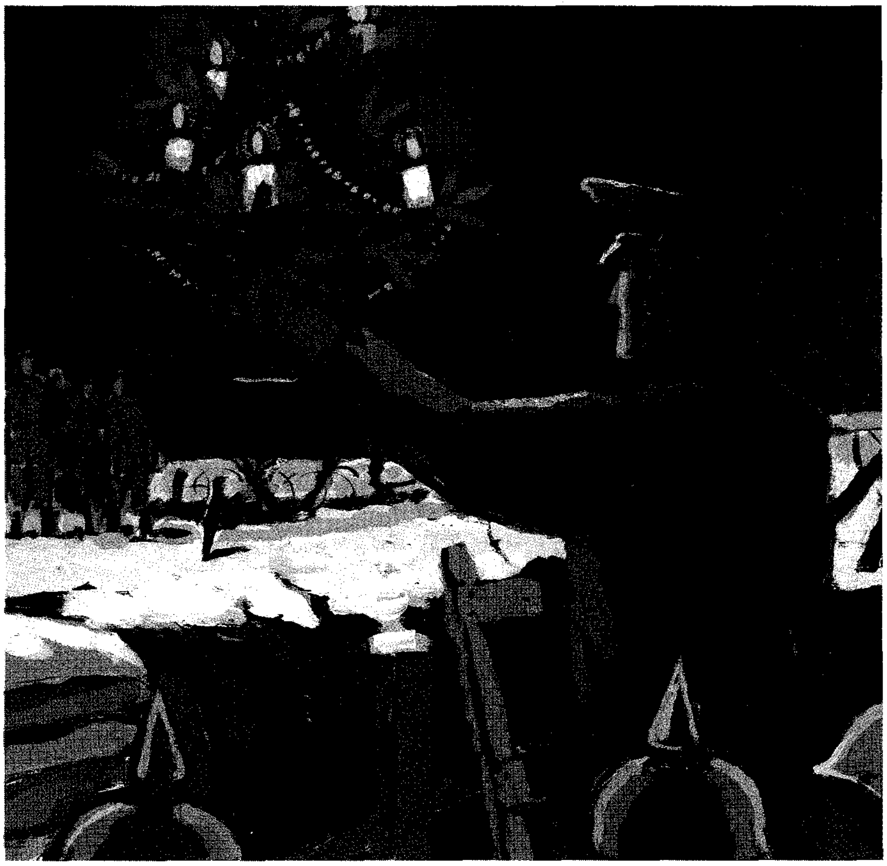
AMERICAN OPERA PROJECTS: "DARKLING"
The composers Stefan Weisman and Lee Hoiby have collaborated on this experimental work directed by Michael Comlish, based on Anna Rabinowitz's book of Holocaust memories. The tenor Jon Garrison and the baritone Marcus DeLoach lead a cast that also includes the actress Elzbieta Czyzewska; members of the Flux Quartet provide the instrumental backup. (East 13th Street Theatre, Third Ave. at 13th St. 212-279-4200. March 2-4 and March 7 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Christoph von Dohnányi, who first conducted Elliott Carter's "Allegro Scorrevole" (the finale of what became a three-part symphony) with the Cleveland Orchestra, will lead the work anew in his upcoming engagement with the Philharmonic, part of a concert that also includes Brahms's Violin Concerto (with the formidable German violinist Frank Peter Zimmermann) and Schumann's febrile Fourth Symphony. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. March 2 and March 7 at 7:30 and March 3-4 at 8.)

VIENNA PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
Riccardo Muti, recently liberated from his vexing tenure as music director of La Scala, comes to Carnegie

Hall with some trusty old friends and some very familiar repertory. March 3 at 8: Hindemith's "Nobilissima Visione" Suite precedes a performance of Schubert's Symphony No. 9 (the "Great"). ♦ March 4 at 8: Schubert's "Rosamunde" Overture and Fourth Symphony (the "Tragic"), along with Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante in E-Flat Major (K. 364) and Strauss's "Death and Transfiguration." ♦ March 5 at 2: Mozart's festive "Haffner" Symphony anchors a program that also includes works by Bartók, Falla ("The Three-Cornered Hat"), and Ravel (the "Rhapsodie Espagnole," a riot of orchestral color). (212-247-7800.)



"Joyeux Noël (Merry Christmas)," directed by Christian Carion, opens March 3.

RUSSIAN NATIONAL ORCHESTRA
Vladimir Jurowski, a smooth and forceful young conductor who has distinguished himself at the Met, makes his New York orchestral début with this superb Moscow ensemble in two all-Tchaikovsky programs. March 5 at 3: The Piano Concerto No. 1 in B-Flat Minor (with Yefim Bronfman) and the "Manfred" Symphony. ♦ March 6 at 8: A clutch of rarities, all inspired by Shakespeare—the "Tempest" Overture, the incidental music to "Hamlet," and the "Romeo and Juliet" Fantasy-Overture (including a vocal duet from an abandoned opera). Richard Thomas reads texts from the plays. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500. Note: The series concludes with a Tchaikovsky-Stravinsky concert on March 8.)

BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
James Levine, a master at combining the intimate with the extreme, precedes a performance of Beethoven's expansive Ninth Symphony (featuring the singers Christine Brewer, Jill Grove, Clifton Forbis, and Albert Dohmen, along with the Tanglewood Festival Chorus) with Schoenberg's knotty Chamber Symphony No. 1. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. March 6 at 8.)

RECITALS

JERUSALEM CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL
In the first of two concerts, an assembly of internationally known musicians (including the flutist Mathieu Dufour and the hornist Marie-Luise Neunecker), all of whom play in the festival for free, perform works by Mozart (including the Quintet for Piano and Winds), Schoenberg (Webern's pocket arrangement of the Chamber Symphony No. 1), and Betty Olivero (an American première). (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. March 1 at 7:30.)

JORDI SAVALL
The almost frighteningly popular Catalonian gamba player is all over town this month; he offers two concerts prior to his Metropolitan Museum residency. March 2 at 7:30: An intimate evening at Weill Recital Hall features solo works by Bach, Marais, and the Messieurs Sainte-Colombe (*père* and *fils*). (212-247-7800.) ♦ March 4 at 8: Savall calls in his heavy artillery—the renowned early-music groups Hespérion XXI and La Capella Reial de Catalunya—to perform Baroque music from Mexico and Spain in the resonant space of the Church of St. Paul the Apostle. (Columbus Ave. at 60th St. 212-854-7799.)

BARGEMUSIC
March 2-3 at 7:30: The cellist Allison Eldredge and the pianist Max Levinson offer an eclectic program of music by Beethoven (the Cello Sonata in C Major, Op. 102, No. 1), Schumann, Falla, and Bartók. ♦ March 4 at 7:30 and March 5 at 4: Works by Beethoven, Dohnányi, and Dvořák (the Piano Quartet in E-Flat Major, Op. 87) offered by the violinist Stephanie Chase, the pianist Doris Stevenson, and others. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

MUSIC AT MERKIN CONCERT HALL
March 5 at 7: The baritone Alexander Hurd, the winner of Joy in Singing's 2005 recital award, sings art songs by Ravel, Schubert, Wolf (selections from the "Italienisches Liederbuch"), and John Musto (a première). ♦ March 7 at 8: The Da Capo Chamber Players, a mainstay of New York's contemporary music scene, celebrate their thirty-fifth birthday with an evening dedicated to world-première works written for the group by several Russian composers. (129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330.)

MOVIES OPENING

AQUAMARINE
Sarah Paxton stars as a mermaid in this teen comedy, directed by Elizabeth Allen. Opening March 3. (In wide release.)

DAVE CHAPPELLE'S BLOCK PARTY
Michel Gondry directed this performance film featuring Chappelle, Erykah Badu, the Fugees, and others. Opening March 3. (In wide release.)

DOING TIME FOR PATSY CLINE
An Australian woman tries to break into Nashville's music scene, in a comedy directed by Chris Kennedy. Opening March 3. (Quad Cinema.)

JOYEUX NOËL (MERRY CHRISTMAS)
Enemy soldiers in the First World War try to make a separate peace at Christmas. Directed by Christian Carion. In French and German. Opening March 3. (Angelika Film Center and Paris.)

OUR BRAND IS CRISIS
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening March 1. (Film Forum.)

16 BLOCKS
A drama, directed by Richard Donner, about a policeman (Bruce Willis) who is assigned to protect a witness (Mos Def). Opening March 3. (In wide release.)

SORRY, HATERS
An American woman takes an interest in the political troubles of a Muslim taxi-driver's brother. Directed by Jeff Stanzler. Opening March 1. (IFC Center.)

ULTRAVIOLET
A futuristic vampire thriller, starring Milla Jovovich, directed by Kurt Wimmer. Opening March 3. (In wide release.)

WOMAN IS THE FUTURE OF MAN
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening March 3. (Cinema Village.)

NOW PLAYING

BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN
In the summer of 1963, Ennis Del Mar (Heath Ledger) and Jack Twist (Jake Gyllenhaal) herd the sheep on Brokeback Mountain, in Wyoming, and fall in love. Ang Lee's movie traces the ups and downs of that love over many years, making it clear that the downs are fated to outnumber the ups. The film has a curious motion to begin with, managing to seem at once hectic and sluggish; once the heroes start to grow up, however, and thus to struggle against their feelings, the story comes painfully alive, and the performances stretch toward the tragic. The picture belongs to Ledger, whose downcast gaze and chewed-up words bear almost unbearable testimony to a heart under siege. Any attempt to promote this as an issue movie, gripped by an agenda, feels badly misplaced; the only issue here is the oldest and most sorrowful one of all.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 12/12/05.) (In wide release.)

CAPOTE
How could Truman Capote, with his high, thin, goose-quill voice and his floating palms, possibly have gained the trust of the straightforward men and women of Holcomb, Kansas, when he went there for this magazine in 1959 to investigate the pointless slaughter of four members of the Clutter family—the murders that became the subject of Capote's masterpiece, "In Cold Blood"? The writer Dan Futterman and the director Bennett Miller tell us how, and the wonderful Philip Seymour Hoffman first captures Capote physically and then works inward to the vulnerable yet rotting soul. This is easily the most intelligent and detailed film ever made about a writer's working method and character.—*David Denby* (10/10/05) (In wide release.)

CRASH
A brazenly alive and heartbreaking film about the rage and foolishness of intolerance—the mutual abrasions of white, black, Latino, Middle Eastern, and Asian citizens in the great and strange city of Los Angeles. The movie starts off with separate vignettes in which the characters run afoul of each other, say things better left unsaid, and get into terrible trouble. Later, they cross paths again, sometimes in bizarre coincidences

JEAN-CLAUDE GOTTING

that feel exactly right; some of these scenes play out at the edge of insanity, where contentiousness spills over into tragedy or farce. The furiously candid screenplay was written by Paul Haggis and Robert Moresco, and the picture was directed by Haggis, who, in his first time out as director, demonstrates an amazing skill with actors.—*D.D.* (5/2/05) (Quad Cinema.)

DARWIN'S NIGHTMARE

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. In English, Russian, and Swahili. (IFC Center.)

GOOD NIGHT, AND GOOD LUCK

George Clooney's nifty account of Edward R. Murrow's historic prime-time assaults on Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, in 1954, imitates many of Murrow's best qualities—it's swift, elegant, grimly humorous, and effective. David Strathairn gets the suavely streamlined Murrow perfectly—the pomaded jet-black hair, the thick brows and unblinking eyes, the curt, rhyming syntax and firm emphasis. Celebrating the end of McCarthyism is only part of Clooney's game. His most serious intention appears to be to deliver a blow to the patella of a somnolent American press that, until recently, has indulged the Bush Administration's most extravagant smears and lies. He has completely succeeded.—*D.D.* (10/10/05) (In wide release.)

A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

David Cronenberg's latest is a noirish story about a seemingly settled Indiana man, Tom Stall (Viggo Mortensen), who displays an unsuspected talent for violence when a couple of killers invade the café he runs in a small town. Soon after, a mobster from Philadelphia with a glass eye (Ed Harris) shows up and addresses Tom as "Joey." Is some sort of buried past taking over Tom's life? The movie asks us to believe that one man can carry two entirely different personalities within him and still be as sane as daylight. Cronenberg's direction, mirroring the split in Tom, is alternately measured and frighteningly explosive, and, as always, he gives the movie a nasty underlay of sexual perversity.—*D.D.* (Cinema Village.)

MUNICH

Steven Spielberg's latest film begins at the Olympic Games in 1972 with the kidnapping and killing of Israeli athletes. It then follows the Israelis' plan to eliminate those whom—rightly or wrongly—they suspect of having backed the attack. Eric Bana plays a Mossad agent who, leaving behind his case officer (Geoffrey Rush) and his pregnant wife (Ayelet Zurer), heads to Europe, where a band of his fellow-specialists join him in the quest for revenge. There has been much inflamed debate over the movie's politics, but the efforts of Spielberg and his screenwriters, Tony Kushner and Eric Roth, to strike a balance—by gesturing to Palestinian grievances or to the assassins' own qualms—leave the film looking agonized and heavy. Good intentions, and a range of strong performances, are never quite enough to quicken the pulse.—*A.L.* (12/26/05 & 1/2/06) (In wide release.)

NIGHT AND FOG

In a half hour that changed modern consciousness, Alain Resnais's 1955 documentary recalls a time when the Holocaust was both recent and unremembered. He edits black-and-white newsreel footage to recount the story of the century's distinctive form of rationalized barbarism, from the rise of Hitler through the deportation to the extermination to the Nuremberg trials, and intercuts it with his own contemporary color footage of the ruins of Auschwitz. His method combines historical investigation with the quest for memory—and the question of why such things should be remembered. The title suggests an answer: it refers to the planned disappearance, personally decreed by Hitler, of resistance fighters in countries occupied by Germany into the black hole of concentration camps. Though Resnais shows unsparingly horrific images of victims who survived and of others who died, he downplays the motive of race hatred and offers instead an ecumenical and politicized view of the camps as industrialization gone mad. Whether right or wrong, his meditation launched a yet unabated flood of cinematic inquiry, remembrance, and self-questioning. In French.—*Richard Brody* (Walter Reade Theatre; March 2.)

NIGHT WATCH

The first part of a trilogy by the Russian director Timur Bekmambetov. Any attempt to summarize the plot is liable to result in complete mental collapse; suffice it to say that it is set largely in modern-day Moscow, that it revolves around the small matter of a global feud between darkness and light, and that the list of characters includes blood drinkers and clairvoyants, plus a well-behaved owl that, much to its own surprise, turns into a naked woman. Some viewers have chided Bekmambetov for trying too hard to emulate the pacing and blowsy special effects of the American blockbuster, but there is a grimy fascination in seeing those methods applied (at a fraction of the cost) to an unfamiliar setting, rife with desperation and decay. In Russian, with artfully worked subtitles.—*A.L.* (2/27/06) (Sunshine Cinema.)

PARADISE NOW

In the West Bank city of Nablus, two seemingly ordinary young Palestinians, Saïd (Kais Nashef) and Khaled (Ali Suliman), turn out to be potential suicide bombers. One of them is a fanatic; the other has rational doubts. A provocative idea, but Hany Abu-Assad's film is missing some connective tissue and a greater context for the men's actions. The most satisfying element is the actual settings—the crumbling and blasted stones of Nablus, and, when the men get to Tel Aviv, the sumptuous glitter of a wealthy modern city. With Lubna Azabal as a vibrant young woman who is sick of violence.—*D.D.* (Sunshine Cinema.)

SOPHIE SCHOLL: THE FINAL DAYS

A careful rendering of a monstrous case. As the title suggests, we follow the last act in the life of Sophie Scholl (Julia Jentsch), who, with her brother Hans (Fabian Hinrichs) and a friend, Christoph Probst (Florian Stetter), was arrested in 1943 on a charge of treason. Their crime was distributing leaflets at Munich University that protested against Nazi rule and an unwinnable war; the punishment was death. Marc Rothemund's film is unadorned and verges on the dull, but behind the plodding procedures of the law you sense the beat of terror, and the effect is to quicken even the most fleeting actions with an emotional charge. The heart of the film is Sophie's three-day interrogation at the hands of Robert Mohr (Alexander Held); although no violence is done, you become gripped by the sight of a dead soul hounding a living one and being outsmarted by her unbreakable goodness. The subsequent trial is a travesty, worsened by one's knowledge that the judge (André Hennicke) really was as maddened and ranting as depicted here. The finale is as quick as it is awful, and not for the faint of heart. In German.—*A.L.* (2/27/06) (Film Forum.)

THE SQUID AND THE WHALE

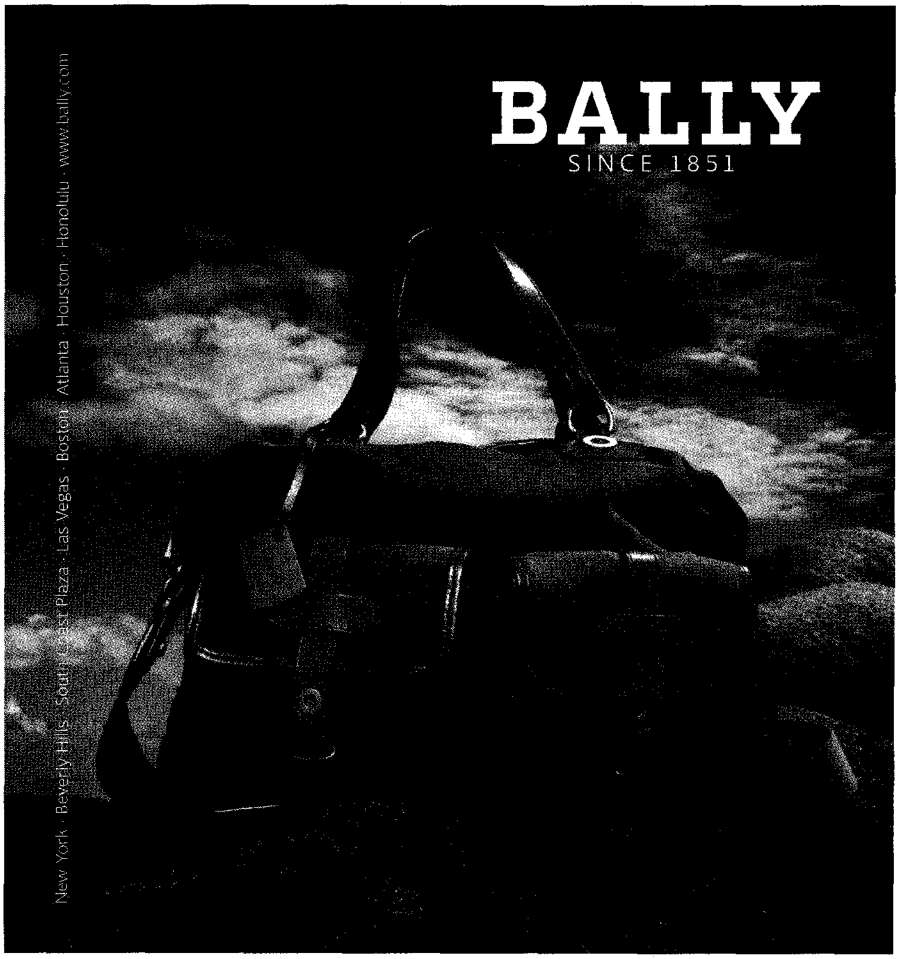
The time is 1986, in Brooklyn's idyllic Park Slope, and a family is breaking up. The dad, Bernard (Jeff Daniels), a college literature teacher and an increasingly unsuccessful novelist, has become a sour and selfish liar; the mom, Joan (Laura Linney), can't stop leaving evidence of her love affairs around the house. Trying to hold on to their love for their parents, their two boys fall into increasingly nutty imitative behavior. Walt (Jesse Eisenberg), sixteen, parrots every one of his dad's huffy opinions; Frank (Owen Kline), is a twelve-year-old in a sexual uproar. The movie is a satirical comedy—ruthless and heartbreaking—but a comedy nonetheless; the writer-director Noah Baumbach has captured the way educated parents project their self-love and their career anxieties onto bright children, and the way kids respond to the currents of parental misconduct like pilot fish shimmying around a wayward shark. Baumbach's touch is light, sure, devastating.—*D.D.* (10/24/05) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

STREET FIGHT

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (IFC Center.)

TRANSAMERICA

In Duncan Tucker's directorial début, Felicity Huffman gives a fascinating performance as Bree (formerly Stanley), an overeducated, self-deprecating transsexual from L.A. on the verge of a sex-change operation. Bree finds out that she is the father of a teen-age son, Toby (Kevin Zegers), who needs bailing out of jail in New York, and her therapist won't approve her operation unless she owns up to the kid. The thin sentimentality offered at the end is no match for Huffman, who soldiers through the film with the distressed bewilderment of a woman caught in a man's body, haunting Bree's every move.—*Shauna Lyon* (In wide release.)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March 7th
SUSAN MORRISON
with *New Yorker* humor writers
ANDY BOROWITZ, PATRICIA MARX, and PAUL SIMMS

April 11th
POETRY IN WARTIME

April 25th
HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR.,
in conversation with SIMON SCHAMA

7 P.M. Doors open at 6:30
Miller Theatre
at Columbia University
2960 Broadway (at 116th Street)

Tickets for each event are free and can be reserved one week in advance of the event date. Please visit cuarts.com or newyorker.com for more information.

TSOTSI
In Gavin Hood's South African drama (an Oscar nominee for best foreign film), the nonactor Presley Chweneyagae plays Tsotsi, a hooded, toughened gang leader in a Johannesburg shantytown who kills for money and beats his friend for challenging his dignity. When Tsotsi shoots a woman for her car and finds that he has unwittingly absconded with her baby, he is struck with a dilemma: what to do with the baby? This would be interesting if Tsotsi's choice were not immediately clear. In a film depicting a seemingly lawless society, where women are decent and men are helpless or derelict without them, Tsotsi's painful attempts to care for an infant seem not revelatory but calculated. Curiously styled, with rap-video camera moves giving way to sensitive closeups, this reductive story of redemption milks the sentimentality, rather than the profundity, born of an extreme change of heart. In Zulu, Xhosa, and Afrikaans.—*S.L.* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

WALK THE LINE
Joaquin Phoenix, with deep-set blue eyes, a long chin, and a scarred lip, is Johnny Cash; Reese Witherspoon, bouncy and smart, with long black tresses, is his beloved June Carter, of the country-singing Carter clan. Phoenix slings his guitar around and guns it at the audience in Cash's shambling style; his singing wavers in pitch, but, all in all, it's not bad. This bio-pic, covering Cash's youth and early manhood, written by James Mangold and Gill Dennis and directed by Mangold, is very pleasant but too conventionally conceived. Phoenix looks at times as if he wanted to kill someone, but the filmmakers haven't written anything interesting for him to say, and most of the time Cash comes off as furtive, weak, and lost. As June stares directly at Cash's weaknesses and nails him every time, the movie becomes a kind of moralizing romantic comedy, in which he struggles to be a man worthy of her love and she struggles against her desire to have him.—*D.D.* (11/21/05) (In wide release.)

WOMAN IS THE FUTURE OF MAN
The setup of the South Korean director Hong Sangsoo's delicate melodrama is classically sentimental: Munho (Yoo Jitae) goes for a drink with his college buddy, Hunjoon (Kim Taewoo), who had gone to America to study filmmaking several years earlier and had left his girlfriend, Sunhwa (Sung Hyunah), behind. In his absence, Munho had pursued her but is now married and has a newborn child. Deep in their cups, the two young men decide to drive to another city and track Sunhwa down. Hong delineates character with the lightest of strokes, and his extremely long, serene takes provide well-defined time and space for the vast emotional shifts of tiny moments to register. He poses bodies with a natural yet balletic equipoise: rarely have intimate love scenes been at once so bluntly physical yet so dignified and dramatically precise. There are no shining heroes here, but the quietly frantic striving for tenderness comes off as a noble, doomed quest. In Korean.—*R.B.* (Cinema Village.)

Also Playing

MATCH POINT: In wide release (1/9/06). **THE NEW WORLD:** In wide release (12/26/05 & 1/2/06). **SYRIANA:** In wide release (12/5/05).

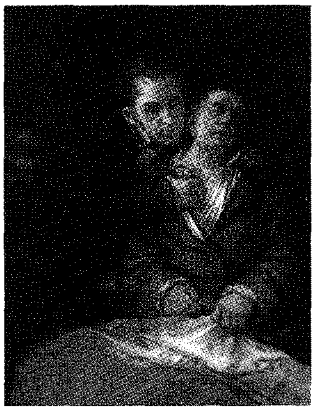
REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"Magic and the American Avant-Garde Cinema." March 1 at 7:30: Films by Maya Deren. ♦ March 2 at 7:30: Films by Harry Smith. ♦ March 3 at 7:30: Films by Kenneth Anger. ♦ March 4 at 5:30: Films by Stan Brakhage, program one. ♦ March 4 at 7:30: Films by Stan Brakhage, program two. ♦ March 5 at 5:30: "Sophie's Place" (1986, Larry Jordan). ♦ March 2-3 at 7:30: Short-film program. ♦ Première. "Iannis Xenakis: La Légende d'Eer" (2004, Bruno Rastoin). ♦ The Films of Arnaud Desplechin. March 4 at 5: "My Sex Life" (1996; in French). ♦ March 4 at 8:30 and March 5 at 8: "Kings and Queen" (2004; in French). ♦ March 5 at 5: "Esther Kahn" (2000).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—The films of Hiroshi Teshigahara. March 1-2 at 4:30, 6:15, 8, and

OPPOSITE: DETAIL FROM "SELF-PORTRAIT WITH DR. ARRIETA," MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ARTS

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
STILL LEARNING



"Goya's Last Works," at the Frick, isn't large, but neither are grenades. Choice paintings, drawings, miniatures on ivory, and lithographs represent the final—though, in respect to dire genius, scarcely declining—years of the last Old Master and first modern artist, who died in 1828 at the age of eighty-two. An illness nearly killed him in 1819—an ordeal memorialized in "Self-Portrait with Dr. Arrieta" (1820), a vertiginously witty masterpiece (virile doctor, deathly frail patient, sinister attending figures) that isn't nearly famous enough. Goya is almost always funny, though often only he, or his imperturbable daemon, laughs. The same aging man who portrayed friends with infectious warmth gazed steadily, with a kind of joy, into abysses of weirdness and horror. Lunatics rave. A portly man lowering himself onto a toilet presents the mooniest buttock ever drawn. A young witch hoists herself aloft with a rope looped under her feet. Wings have been strapped to a little dog, in the sky. They don't work. It plummets earthward.

—Peter Schjeldahl

9:40: "Antonio Gaudí" (1984). ♦ March 3 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15 and March 4-5 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Pitfall" (1962; in Japanese). ♦ "Some Kind of Horror Show." March 6 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Four Flies on Grey Velvet" (1971, Dario Argento; in Italian). ♦ March 7 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Keep" (1983, Michael Mann).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. March 1-2 at 1, 3:10, 5:20, 7:30, and 9:40: "Black Orpheus" (1959, Marcel Camus; in Portuguese). ♦ March 3-8 at 1:30, 4, 7, and 9:30: "Blue Velvet" (1986, David Lynch).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—In revival. March 7 at 12:30, 4, and 7: "When the Sea Rises" (2004, Yolande Moreau and Gilles Porte; in French).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Waverly Midnights." March 3-4 at midnight: "Boxcar Bertha" (1972, Martin Scorsese).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Grand Illusions," French animation. All films are in French. March 1 at 6 and March 5 at 1: "The Dog, the General, and the Birds" (2003, Francis Nielsen). ♦ March 2 at 8:15: "The Triplets of Belleville" (2003, Sylvain Chomet). ♦ March 4 at 2: "The King and the Mockingbird" (1979, Paul Grimault). ♦ March 4 at 4: "La Table Tournante" (1988, Jacques Demy and Grimault). ♦ "Two Legends." March 1 at 6:15 and March 4 at 5: "Alexander," the director's cut (2005, Oliver Stone). ♦ March 2 at 7:30 and March 5 at 3:30: "Kaspar Hauser" (1997, Peter Sehr; in German). ♦ Through March 13: "Documentary Fortnight." March 1 at 8:30, March 2-4 at 6, March 5 at 4, and March 6 at 6: "The Other Side" (2005, Natalia Almada; in Spanish). ♦ March 3 at 8: "Sentenced Home" (2005, David Grabias and Nicole Newnham) and "Rosevelt's America" (2005, Roger Weisberg and Tod Lending). ♦ March 4 at 8: "Moving Forward" (2005, Karen Zider; in English and Spanish), "I Am Alcántara" (2004, Gisela Sanders Alcántara; in Spanish), and "Tropic of Cancer" (2004, Eugenio Polgovsky; in Spanish). ♦ March 5 at 6: "A Model for Matisse" (2005, Barbara Freed; in French). ♦ "Prix Jean Vigo." March 2 at 6 and March 4 at 2: "Le Beau Serge" (1959, Claude Chabrol; in French). ♦ Special screening. March 6 at 8: "Eugene O'Neill: A Documentary Film" (2006, Ric Burns), followed by a panel discussion with Burns, Christopher Plummer, Arthur and Barbara Gelb, and others.

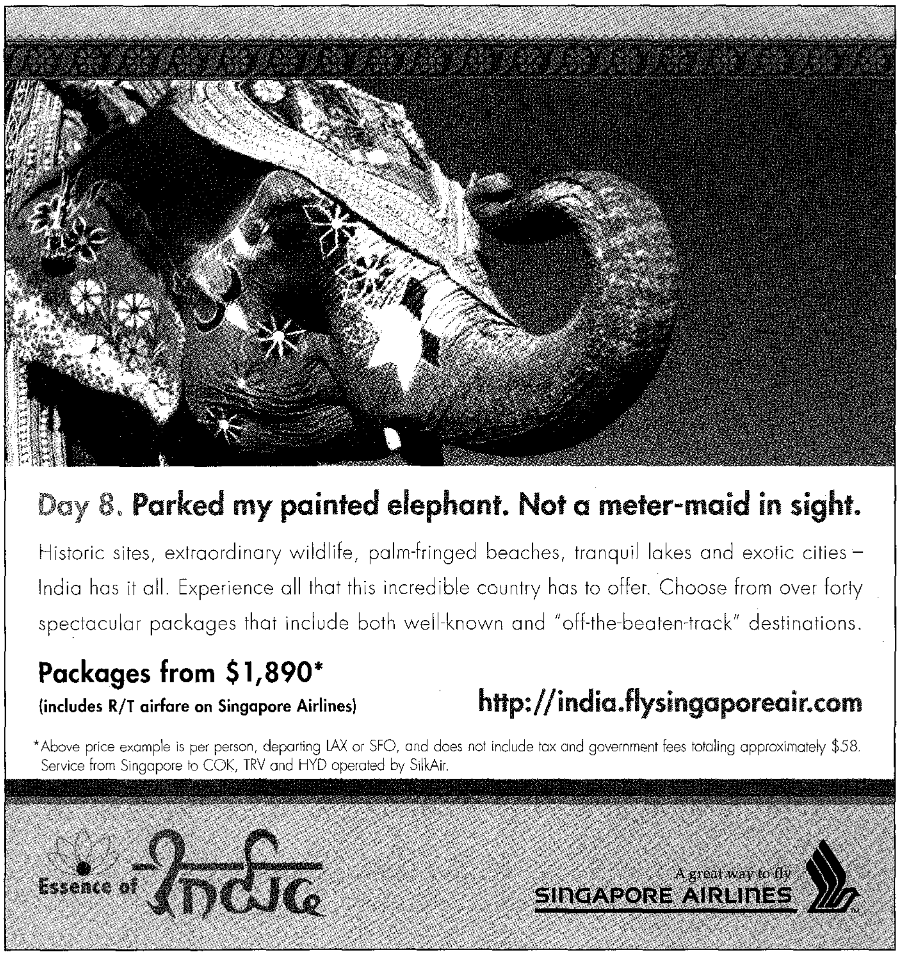
MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)— Repertory nights. March 3 at 7:30 and March 4-5 at 6:30: "The Passenger" (1975, Michelangelo Antonioni). ♦ Films featuring Anna May Wong. March 4-5 at 2: "The Toll of the Sea" (1922, Chester M. Franklin; silent). The March 4 screening will be introduced by Shirley Jennifer Lim. ♦ March 4-5 at 4: "Piccadilly" (1929, E. A. Dupont; silent).

PIONEER THEATRE
155 E. 3rd St. (212-591-0434)—Premières. March 1 at 9: "Love" (2005, Vladan Nikolić). ♦ March 2-7 at 9: "Home" (2005, Matt Zoller Seitz). ♦ Films from Croatia. March 2 at 7: "Witnesses" (2003, Vinko Bresan; in Croatian). ♦ In revival. March 3 at 6:30: "Gloria" (1980, John Cassavetes). ♦ Special screenings. March 3 at 11: Highlights from the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival. ♦ March 6 at 7: "2001 Maniacs" (2005, Tim Sullivan). ♦ March 7 at 7: Highlights from the 2005 Slamdance Festival.

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." March 3-4: "The Taking of Pelham One Two Three" (1974, Joseph Sargent).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—"Film Currents." March 5 at 2 and 4:30 and March 7 at 3:30 and 8:30: "Ballets Russes" (2005, Daniel Geller and Dayna Goldfine). ♦ Film classics. March 5 at 7 and March 7 at 6: "Nights of Cabiria" (1957, Federico Fellini; in Italian).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through March 9: "To Reality and Back: Classic and Contemporary French


Day 8. Parked my painted elephant. Not a meter-maid in sight.

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Documentaries." All films are in French. March 1 at 2 and March 4 at 5: "Le Filmeur" (2005, Alain Cavalier), introduced by the director. ♦ March 1 at 4 and March 4 at 9:15: "Basse Normandie" (2004, Simon Reggiani and Patricia Mazuy). ♦ March 1 at 8:45: "Le Joli Mai" (1962, Chris Marker). ♦ March 2 at 1 and 8:45: "Statues Also Die" (1953, Alain Resnais and Marker), "All the Memory in the World" (1956, Resnais), and "Night and Fog" (†). ♦ March 2 at 2:45 and March 3 at 8:45: "Down to Earth" (2000, Ariane Doublet). ♦ March 2 at 4:30 and March 4 at 7:15: "The Gleaners and I" (2000, Agnès Varda). ♦ March 2 at 6:15 and March 3 at 4:30: "Drancy Avenir" (1997, Arnaud des Pallières). ♦ March 3 at 2 and 6:30: "Love Exists" (1961, Maurice Pialat) and "Recreations" (1993, Claire Simon). ♦ March 5 at 12:30: "Reprise" (1997, Hervé Le Roux). ♦ March 6 at 1:30: "A Visitor from the Living" (1997, Claude Lanzmann) and "Saia, the Shadows" (2000, Florent Marcie). ♦ March 6 at 3:45: "Starting Place" (1993, Robert Kramer). ♦ March 6 at 5:45 and March 7 at 1: "À Propos de Nice" (1930, Jean Vigo) and "Ceux de Chez Nous" (1914/1939, Sacha Guitry). ♦ March 6 at 7:15 and March 7 at 2:30: "Every Little Thing" (1996, Nicolas Philibert). ♦ March 6 at 9:15 and March 7 at 4:30: "The Sofri Affair" (2001, Jean-Louis Comolli).

READINGS AND TALKS

NEW YORK SOCIETY FOR ETHICAL CULTURE
The octogenarian author Norman Mailer talks with his twenty-seven-year old son, John Buffalo Mailer. (2 W. 64th St., at Central Park W. 212-874-5210. March 2 at 7.)

KEN MILLETT
Millett, a professor of mathematics at the University of California, Santa Barbara, discusses the history, theory, and taxonomy of one of man's oldest activities, tying knots. (The Drawing Center, 35 Wooster St. For more information, call 718-222-8434. March 2 at 7.)

DAVID GATES AND JONATHAN AMES
The novelists read from their latest work. (Paragraph Workspace for Writers, 35 W. 14th St. 646-216-8407. March 3 at 8.)

WHITNEY BIENNIAL 2006
The curators Chrissie Iles and Philippe Vergne discuss the new show with Mark di Suvero, Rirkrit Tiravanija, whose Peace Tower is on display in the Sculpture Court, Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzedilla and other participants. (Madison Ave. at 75th St. 212-570-7715. March 4 at 6.)

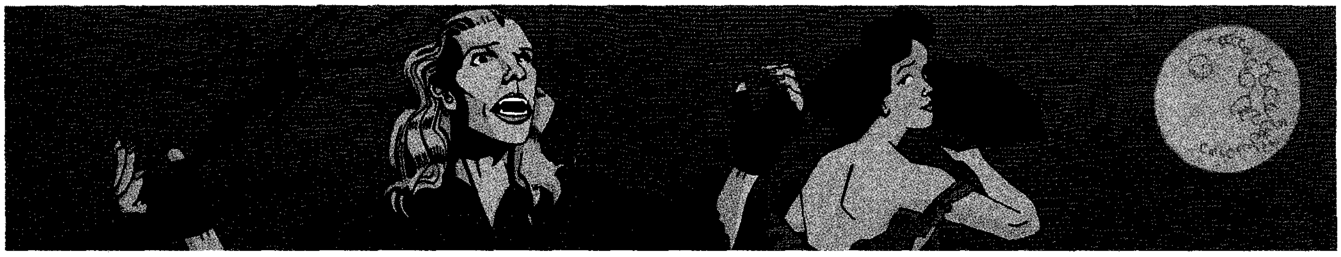
LIZA DONNELLY
The *New Yorker* cartoonist, whose latest book is "Funny Ladies: The New Yorker's Greatest Women Cartoonists and Their Cartoons," gives an illustrated talk about the history of female cartoonists at the magazine. (Museum of Comic and Cartoon Art, 594 Broadway, between Houston and Prince Sts. 212-254-3511. March 6 at 6:30.)

POETRY SOCIETY OF AMERICA
The society presents Franz Wright and Frank Young. (National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park S. For more information, call 212-254-9628. March 6 at 7:30.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

92ND STREET Y POETS' THEATRE
Five dramatic readings are taking place on the Upper East Side this spring, starting on March 6 with an adaptation of Leo Tolstoy's "The Kreutzer Sonata," in which the actor Larry Pine brings to life the count's tale of a marriage poisoned by jealousy and music. It is directed by his wife, Margaret Pine. On March 13, Kathryn Walker leads a charge through the Odyssey with Kate Burton and other actors. Samuel Beckett gets his due on April 3 when the Nine Circles Chamber Theatre presents "Cascando," "Words and Music," and "But the Clouds." May 15th features Glyn Maxwell's "The Sugar Mile," his book-length verse about New York City, the London Blitz, and the events of September 11th. The series ends on May 24 with André Gregory's "Bone Songs," performed by the director and others. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. All shows are at 8.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
Christie's brightens the gray days of late winter with a sale of Impressionist and modern art (March 1), offering a selection that includes a cartoonish depiction of "Le Tennis" in purples and greens by Charles Lapicque and a delicate drawing in crayon and white chalk of a young man in profile, a study for Klimt's "Romeo and Juliet" murals in Vienna's Burgtheater. On the following day, the house offers American art from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but those in search of stiffer stuff may opt for Christie's first-ever evening sale of fine and rare wines, at which a case of 1985 Romanée-Conti or a jeroboam (equivalent to six bottles) of La Tâche could easily wipe out Junior's college fund. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ Two watercolor "wild things" by Maurice Sendak, a reminder of "the night Max wore his wolf suit and made mischief," parade impishly in **Sotheby's** sale of American paintings, drawings, and sculpture on March 1, followed by a notably less whimsical auction of arcade (that is, inexpensive) furniture and decorations on March 2. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ At **Swann**, prints from the collection of Sylvan Cole, a postwar pioneer in the field of print collecting, go on sale on March 6. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)



JASHAR AWAN

ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
UNUSUAL SUSPECTS
March 17–April 13

Don Siegel became a director in 1945 and soon established himself as a poet of cinematic violence. Film Forum's retrospective includes "Baby Face Nelson," with Mickey Rooney; "The Beguiled," starring Clint Eastwood as a soldier trapped in a girls' school; and "The Killers," a made-for-TV adaptation of the Hemingway story starring Lee Marvin, Angie Dickinson, and Ronald Reagan in his last unelected role. (212-727-8110.)

THE THEATRE
BLOOD WORK
March 25

"Lestat," a musical based on Anne Rice's "Vampire Chronicles," follows a tormented young man-turned-bloodsucker who succumbs to his vampiric ways. Elton John wrote the music; the lyrics were written by his longtime collaborator Bernie Taupin. (212-307-4100.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
STRUNG ALONG
April 2 and April 10

In April, the Metropolitan Museum of Art will furnish a steady supply of high-grade guitar music, offering concerts with exciting collaborations—one with the brothers Sérgio and Odair Assad (performing works by Rameau, Ravel, Dyens, and others) and another with Eliot Fisk and the flamenco master Paco Peña. (212-570-3949.)

NIGHT LIFE
RAW AND COOKED
April 4–5

The young British rock band Art Brut stops by the Bowery Ballroom next month with taut guitar-driven music that showcases its sense of humor as much as its impeccable songcraft. (212-533-2111.)

ART
ABSTRACT THOUGHT
April 5–July 2

The Studio Museum in Harlem will follow "Frequency"—its current survey of contemporary African-American artists—with a show that focusses on an earlier generation of innovators. "Energy/Experimentation: Black Artists and Abstraction 1964-1980" is curated by Kellie Jones and will include work by fifteen abstract artists, among them William T. Williams, Alma Thomas, Howardena Pindell, Joe Overstreet, and Sam Gilliam. (212-864-4500.)

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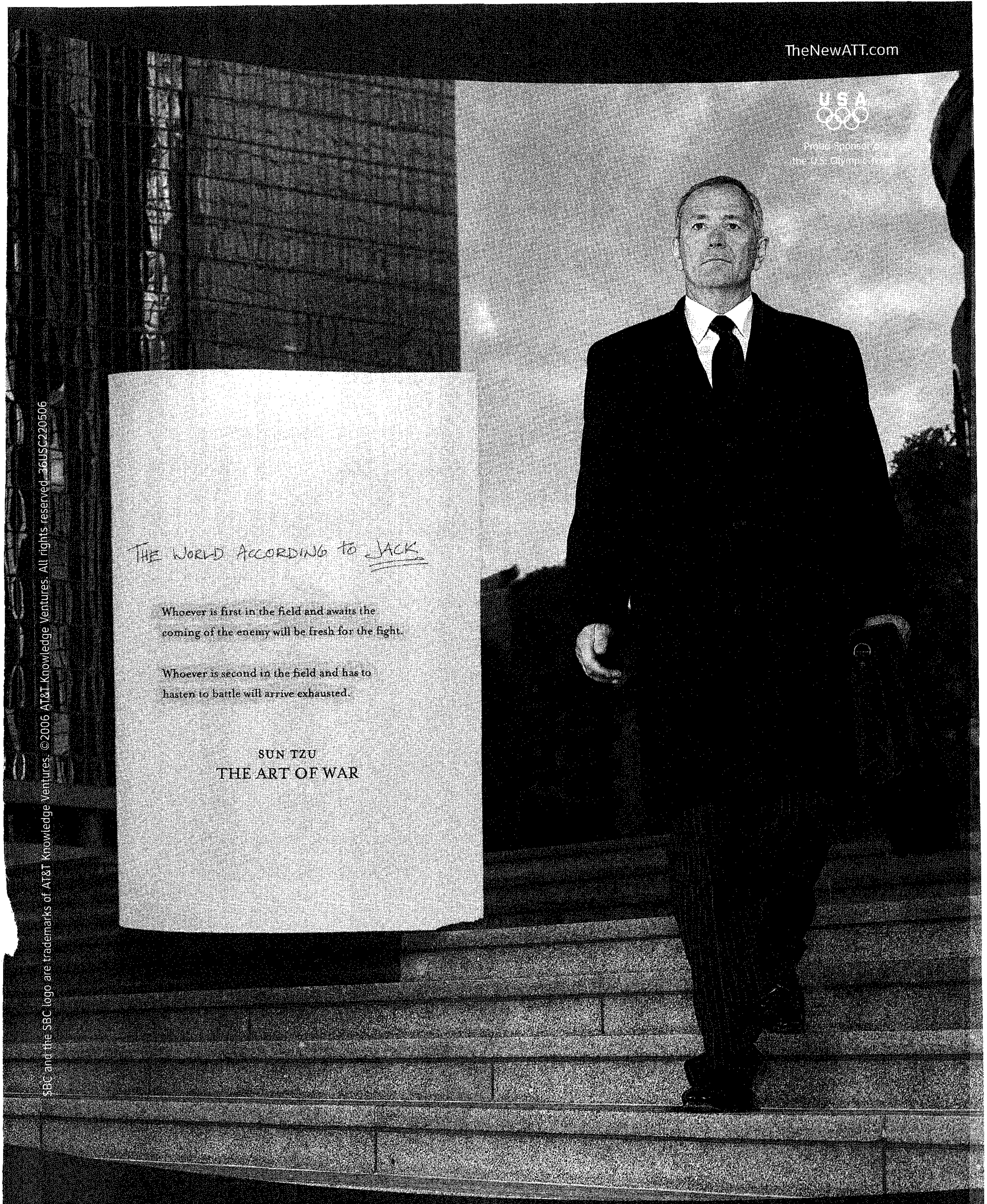

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Whoever is second in the field and has to hasten to battle will arrive exhausted.

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THE
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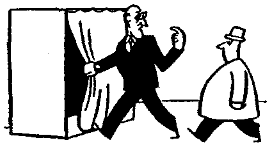
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

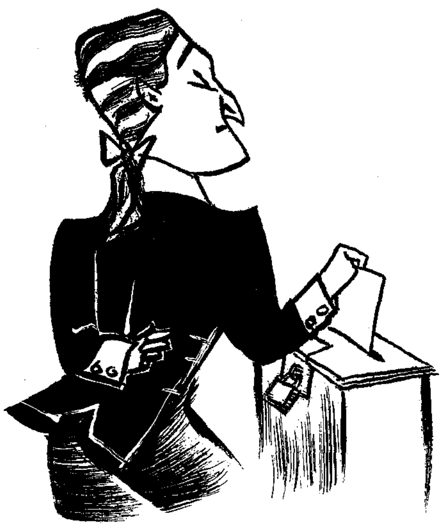
COMMENT
COUNT 'EM



Last Thursday morning, in one of the smaller function rooms at the National Press Club, in Washington, an ad-hoc bunch of amateurs, once-weres, might-bes, and goo-goos floated an initiative that, with a little luck, could enable our ramshackle republic to take a long, and long overdue, step toward a more perfect union. The idea behind their initiative is this: that the President of the United States should be elected by the people of the United States.

This idea is neither new nor outlandish, but for most of the past couple of centuries it has been dismissed as unachievable. The Electoral College is enshrined in the Constitution itself, so getting rid of it would require the concurrence of two-thirds of both houses of Congress plus three-quarters of the state legislatures. That's not going to happen.

But maybe it doesn't have to. The promoters of the Campaign for a National Popular Vote, as they're calling themselves, have come up with an elegant finesse. Instead of trying to change the Constitution, they propose to apply it, one bit in particular: Article II, Section 1, which instructs each state to "appoint" its Presidential electors "in such Manner as the Legislature thereof may direct." Here's how the plan would work. One by one, legislature by legislature, state law by state law, individual states would pledge themselves to an interstate compact under which they would agree to award their electoral votes to the nationwide winner of the popular vote. The compact would take effect only when enough states had joined it to elect a President—that is, enough to cast a majority of the five hundred and thirty-eight electoral votes. (Theoretically, as few as eleven states could do the trick.) And then, presto! All of a sudden, the people of all fifty states plus the District of Columbia are empowered to elect their President the same way they elect their governors, mayors, senators, and congressmen. We still have the Electoral College, with its colorful eighteenth-century rituals, but it can no longer do any damage. It becomes a tourist attraction, like the British monarchy.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

There is very little doubt about the constitutional and legal feasibility of this plan. The power of state legislatures to direct the choice of their states' electors, the Supreme Court has repeatedly ruled, is essentially unlimited. As the Court pointed out in one well-known case,

> the State legislature's power to select the manner for appointing electors is plenary; it may, if it so chooses, select the electors itself, which indeed was the manner used by State legislatures in several States for many years after the Framing of our Constitution. (*Bush v. Gore*, 2000)

The political feasibility of the plan is another matter. Its initial backers are middleweights at best. Its originator is a scientist—John R. Koza, a Stanford professor who teaches courses in genetic algorithms and made a small fortune by co-inventing the rub-off instant lottery ticket. At Thursday's press conference, a few representatives of the media's wonkish fringe (*Congressional Quarterly*, *Roll Call*, C-Span) heard mostly from formers: John Anderson, a former Republican congressman from Illinois (and 1980 independent Presidential candidate); Birch Bayh, a former Democratic senator from Indiana; and John Buchanan, a former Republican congressman from Alabama. Former Representative Tom Campbell, of California, and former Senators Jake Garn, of Utah, and David Durenberger, of Minnesota—Republicans all—have also signed on. The presence of so many Republicans is a deliberate choice, designed to counter suspicions that a Democratic plot is afoot. But, in reality, no one has the slightest idea which party, if either, would benefit. It's true that George W. Bush's court-certified five-hundred-and-thirty-seven-vote edge in Florida trumped Al Gore's half-million-vote national plurality in 2000. But it's also true that Bush's three-million-vote majority in 2004 would have been vaporized by a switch of sixty thousand votes in Ohio.

On the other hand, in only one of the past twenty-nine Presidential elections has the winner of the popular vote not also been the winner of the electoral vote. So why not stick with an arrangement that, since 1888, has "worked" ninety-seven per cent of the time? Because the deepest argument for a national popular vote has nothing to do with who wins. It has to do with the over-all health of a democratic order.

As has become increasingly clear over the past few general elections, with their red states and blue states, an American Presidential campaign is no longer truly national. It takes place almost exclusively in the purple states—the "battleground states," where neither party can be sure of a lock. In 2004, there were thirteen such states, accounting for twenty-eight per cent of the population (and thirty-two per cent of the ultimate vote, since turnout increases with the uncertainty of the outcome). In the final month, the candidates spent $237 million on advertising, $229 million of it in those thirteen states. (In twenty-three states, they didn't spend a dime.) At the same time, President Bush, Vice-President Cheney, Senator Kerry, and Senator Edwards attended a total of two hundred and ninety-one campaign events. Two hundred and sixty-eight of them were in the lucky thirteen.

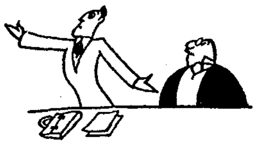
There's a traditional view that without the Electoral College Presidential campaigns would simply ignore the small states. It hasn't worked that way. The real division that the Electoral College creates, in tandem with the winner-take-all rule, is not between large states and small states but between battleground states and what might be called spectator states. Of the thirteen least populous states, six are red, six are blue, and one—New Hampshire—is up for grabs. Guess which twelve Bush and Kerry stiffed and which one got plenty of love, long after the primary season? Size doesn't matter. At the other end of the spectrum, the three biggest states—blue California, red Texas, and blue New York—were utterly ignored, except for purposes of fund-raising.

That's not the worst of it, though. After all, some people might count it a blessing to be spared the October onslaught of thirty-second spots and traffic jams caused by self-important motorcades. The worst of it is the death of participatory politics in two-thirds of the country. If you live in a spectator state, it might be fun to persuade your neighbors to vote your way, or ring their doorbells, or hand them leaflets. But it can't make a difference. And it doesn't matter which side you're on or which color your state is. Widening your ticket's margin of victory or narrowing its margin of defeat is equally pointless. In this sense, our Presidential campaigns are not only not national; in most of the country they're not local, either. They're just not.

For fifty years, polls have consistently shown that seventy per cent of the public favors direct election. Nevertheless, the National Popular Vote plan will meet with a lot of resistance, some of it from battleground-state politicians. But in all those spectator states there are scores of millions of voters, and thousands of politicians, who would like to get in on the game. They might prefer to see our Presidents elected not by red states and blue states and purple states, and not by big states or small states, but by the United States. Last Friday, a bill went into the hopper of the Illinois legislature. We'll see.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

PRE-GAME DEPT.
BRUCE AND EDDIE'S DAY OUT



Last Friday, Counsellor Bruce Cutler needed to talk to Counsellor Edward Hayes. Never mind that Cutler had eaten dinner—osso buco and a couple of vodka shots—the night before at Hayes's house. It had been hard to get any privacy, Cutler said, what with the distracting company: Hayes's wife, Susie, "a beautiful redhead named C.C., a couple of real top-shelf European men." Cutler (substantial, avuncular) needed to talk to Hayes (fidgety, health freak) because Monday was going to be an important day, with a courtroom check-in for their clients, "Mafia Cops" Louis Eppolito and Stephen Caracappa, another beefy/wiry, dead-calm/hyper pair of friends, whose trial, on charges of murder and conspiracy, is to begin on March 6th. Hayes and Cutler decided to spend the afternoon together, like football players carb-loading before the big game. "We like to exercise, read, shop, and talk," Cutler said, in a cutthroat rasp. (He neglected to mention performing high-roughneck street theatre.) "We talk about life, the world, politics. People that we respect and people that we don't."

Their first stop was H. Herzfeld, a haberdashery on East Fifty-seventh Street. Cutler was wearing a houndstooth suit over a midnight-blue polo, collar up. Hayes, whose memoir, "Mouthpiece," just came out, had a sharper look: worsted navy suit ("made by a wonderful young guy in England"), blue self-striped shirt ("E.W.H." above the rib), suspenders (embellished with chess pieces), peach tie. He looked as if he hadn't been sleeping well.

"I just have the blues and grays," Cutler said. "Eddie has the flash and dash."

"Eddie, do you like this for St. Patrick's Day?" Cutler said, fingering a green tie with a hunting motif. "It's something Teddy Roosevelt might wear."

"Sure," Hayes said. "I like the idea of a guy from Brooklyn wearing those Waspy ties." A salesman boxed up the purchases. Cutler took his parcel, but Hayes said he'd send a boy to get his. A town car was idling outside, and Hayes got in. Cutler stood there.

"May I get in the car?" he said to the driver, a retired N.Y.P.D. detective who was doing a favor for Hayes. "I don't like to take liberties, Eddie. You don't introduce anybody to anybody."

As Cutler, a decline-of-civilization man, made conversation with the driver, Hayes, fulminating intermittently about the "totally out-of-control Justice Department," made and answered a never-ending series of phone calls. The result was a street-talk symphony in two keys. Cutler carried the steady bass line. Hayes cut in every now and then with a nasal coloratura.

"John, what's your last name?"

"*Hello, it's Eddie Hayes. How ya doin'?*"

“Palamar.”

“*...swear to God, she’s, like, fifty, a nice-looking woman.*”

“Do you work with former Detective McGann?”

“*Friend a his, friend a mine . . .*”

“McGann or McCann?”

“*Are you high now, or are you straight?*”

“He’s a good man.”

“*They evicted you?!*”

“I need some quiet time with Eddie,” Cutler said. “I need two hours without the cell phone, e-mails, blueberries, BlackBerrys, strawberries.” He had a plan. “I’m gonna take him down to see my friend Father Kevin Nealan at the Church of St. Bernard. He’s gonna let Eddie and me have a room. To meet, talk, strategize.” He continued, “I met Kevin doing community service, when I was convicted for contempt of court. Six hundred and two hours I put in.”

Retired Detective Palamar pulled over at Forty-fourth Street, in front of Hallo Berlin, a German restaurant.

Inside, Cutler unbuttoned his jacket. “Bruce! You lost a lot of weight. You don’t have that thing anymore,” Hayes said, gesturing at Cutler’s phantom spare tire.

When the platters of knockwurst and bratwurst came, Hayes pushed up his sleeves to tuck in. His cufflinks were in the shape of screws. “Screws are what they used to call prison guards,” he said. “Or bulls. Or hacks.”

Cutler said, “John Gotti once had a driver, Bobby Boriello, pull over when we couldn’t figure out how to get on the B.Q.E. He told him, ‘Ask the hack,’ ”—meaning a traffic cop. “He was so used to jail.” He laughed.

A waitress approached and Cutler asked, “May I have some extra napkins, you beautiful lady of, I think, Indian descent?”

The waitress looked baffled.

“No, she’s from, like, Guyana,” Hayes told his friend.

The waitress caught on. “I’m from Bangladesh.”

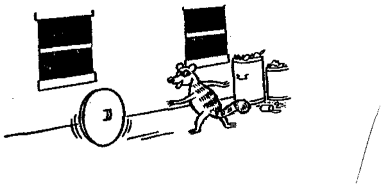
“Eddie, you don’t understand world history,” Cutler said.

“Eddie!” he said. He pointed at Hayes’s dove-gray fedora, which he’d put on the table, facing down. “Eddie, you should put a hat *this* way.” He made a turning-over motion. “Put it this way, for luck.”

—*Lauren Collins*

LOST AND FOUND DEPT.

THE MARBLE FAUN



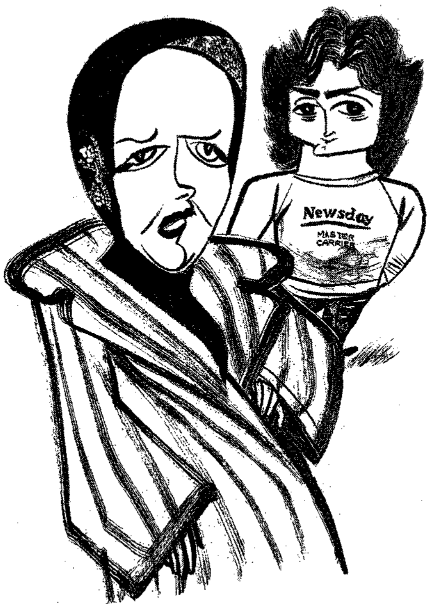
One afternoon last year, a woman got into a taxi lugging a video camera and a tripod. The driver, a stocky middle-aged man with close-cropped hair and a goatee, asked her if she was in the film business and if she had ever seen the movie “Grey Gardens.” She said yes. “Well,” the driver said. “I’m the Marble Faun.” The woman gasped and told him, “Albert Maysles has been looking for you for years.”

“Grey Gardens,” Albert and David Maysles’ 1975 cult documentary, chronicled the lives of the eccentric socialite Edith Bouvier Beale (Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis’s aunt) and her middle-aged daughter, Little Edie, who lived together in gothic isolation in a decaying, cat-ridden East Hampton mansion. As aficionados will recall, the only regular visitor to the Beales’ self-contained world was a sensitive teen-age handyman, with delicate features, big hair, and a Brooklyn accent. Little Edie nicknamed him the Marble Faun, after the Nathaniel Hawthorne novel, but his given name was Jerry Torre. No one had heard from him since 1979.

Not long after the encounter in the taxi, Albert Maysles (David died in 1987) and his long-lost subject were reunited. Torre learned not only that he had become a camp icon but that he was about to be portrayed onstage in a musical based on the film. (It opens next month, at Playwrights Horizons.)

Torre grew up in Brooklyn, the son of a sanitation worker and a school custodian. (He claims that Joe Torre, the manager of the Yankees, is a distant cousin.) He ran away when he was sixteen and found his way to East Hampton, where he worked as a gardener on an estate next door to Grey Gardens. One afternoon, Torre decided to explore the seemingly abandoned property. “I had no idea that anybody actually lived there—there were cobwebs all over the vestibule,” he recalled. “But I knock on the door, and, sure enough, Edie comes walking down the stairs in one of her turbans. Frankly, I shit a brick, because I thought she was going to report me for trespassing. Instead, she embraced me, stroked my hair, and said, ‘Oh, my God—the Marble Faun has arrived.’ I had no idea what she meant, but I was enthralled.”

Despite the moldering furniture and the raccoons that fell through holes in the ceiling, Torre found a second home at Grey Gardens. He also found a second mother in Mrs. Beale, who, he recalled, used to lecture him on the importance of a balanced diet and then serve him liver pâté and undercooked corn. Torre says they became close after he persuaded E.M.S. workers not to take her to a hospital, during a raid by the health department. He remembers his relationship with Edie as more of a “sibling rivalry.” He said, “The Beales showed me a life where you could be yourself, explore, take chances. Who was I to ask them why they chose to live in such filth and squalor?”



Little Edie Beale and the Marble Faun

In the film, Mrs. Beale says, “Jerry’s out every night with a different girl.” In fact, Torre’s life outside Grey Gardens centered on local gay night spots, such as the Attic. And he often drove into the city to spend evenings cruising bathhouses in a towel (he says he was voted Mr. Club Baths 1977) or dancing in his jockstrap on the bar at the Anvil.

Though she didn’t appear in the Maysleses’ movie, Jacqueline Onassis turns up in the musical, as the young

Jackie Bouvier. Torre recalls meeting Onassis when she visited Grey Gardens. He says that she used to call the house occasionally, to check on her aunt and cousin, and that she once asked him to take her out clubbing. He remembers bringing her to the Anvil, where they watched a fire-eating drag contortionist perform. Afterward, Onassis's driver took them back to her building, where she invited Torre up for a drink. "I said no thanks," he said. "I went back to the Anvil."

After "Grey Gardens" was released, Torre says, he helped Edie out with a cabaret act that she had put together. But after Mrs. Beale died, in 1977, Edie sold the house, eventually moving to Florida (she died in 2002), and they lost touch. Torre took a job with the Saudi royal family, tending a two-and-a-half-acre tropical garden in Riyadh. He had his own villa, with a pool and a personal chef, but he found life lonely.

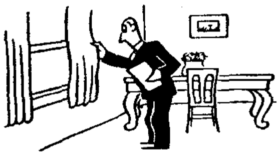
After returning to the States, he moved to the East Village and opened an art-moving company, called AAA All-Boro Trucking. He ran the business with his boyfriend, who died in the late eighties. Despondent, Torre went into seclusion. He eventually moved to Sunnyside, Queens, where he lives now. He drives a taxi three days a week, and he spends most of his free time chatting on the Internet, working out, and carving nude sculptures out of marble. He recently bought a copy of "The Marble Faun" on Amazon, but he hasn't got around to reading it yet.

The other day, Torre attended a preview of "Grey Gardens," the musical, in which the role of Jerry is played by a square-jawed young actor named Matt Cavenaugh. He wears a *Newsday* sweatshirt and a painter's cap, as Torre did as a teen-ager, and what looks like a Beatles wig. Torre's eyes teared up several times during the show, particularly when, after a song called "Jerry Likes My Corn," the stage Jerry said, "You be good now, Mrs. Beale—you take care of yourself."

"It's actually a relief to see somebody playing me for a change," Torre said later. "He portrayed me as a little dim-witted, but otherwise it was pretty accurate." He added, "The depiction of Jerry's hair—that wig he sported—it didn't quite work."

—Adam Green

NEW ORLEANS POSTCARD
CONSULAT D'INFLUENCE



At the corner of Prytania and First Street, in New Orleans, stands a brick mansion with a French tricolor drooping from the gable. Eleven days after the levees failed, last August, heavily armed federal agents were banging on doors all over the city to order a "mandatory evacuation," and the residents of the mansion were hastening to comply. A thin middle-aged man feverishly loaded file boxes into the back of a silver S.U.V. He introduced himself as Pierre Lebovics, France's consul-general, and side-stepped the question about whether he felt that his rights had been violated by the evacuation order. "You have your, your—" he circled a hand impatiently in front of his face. "Your Bill of Rights, your Constitution." He flapped the hand dismissively and got behind the wheel. "I am going to Baton Rouge!" he shouted. "But I will return."

The house stayed empty for weeks, but recently Lebovics answered the door, in an open-necked shirt with a green cashmere sweater draped over his shoulders. Lebovics is fifty-four but looks much younger. He is serious to the point of dour, with longish dark curls and circular horn-rimmed glasses. "France opened its first consulate in the United States right here in New Orleans after the Louisiana Purchase, in 1803," he said as he sat himself primly on a red sofa. "But we have been in this house only since the nineteen-fifties."

Lebovics spent most of his life as a Russian scholar, and after becoming a diplomat he was assigned, with the logic of foreign ministries worldwide, to two non-Russian-speaking countries: Israel and the Czech Republic. He took over in New Orleans less than a month before Katrina hit, and, despite the chaos the storm has wrought, he relishes serving in this most French of American cities. "There is a part of French culture tinged with Cajun and Creole culture," he said. "These roots run very deep in France."

New Orleans has long been a tourist destination for the French, several of whom got a lesson, from Katrina, in how American the city also is. "The Saturday before the storm, I got a call from some French tourists who wanted to evacuate," Lebovics said. They went to the most logical place, for Europeans: the train station. "Someone had decided to close the railway station on the day they were telling people to evacuate. These tourists found that quite extraordinary."

Lebovics enumerated the ways in which France has come to the aid of New Orleans, including sending tons of food and supplies, a team of divers to help assess and repair damage to the port, and funds to reopen bilingual-immersion schools where young teachers from France, on loan to Louisiana, have for thirty years taught what Lebovics called "French French."

The French Minister of Culture, Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres, was the first foreign dignitary to visit New Orleans after the storm, and the government quickly decided that France could be most useful in helping to preserve the city's artistic attributes. A "solidarity" concert in Paris raised money for musicians; the Louvre, the Georges Pompidou Center, and the Musée d'Orsay are planning a major exhibition of French art at the New Orleans Museum of Art early next year. And the French government raised a million dollars for Louisiana schools. The French are offering six-week residencies in France for artists displaced by the flood. "The idea is to offer them good conditions—lodging and a stipend, and contacts with people," Lebovics said. "A fresh oxygen."

Lebovics was looking forward to Mardi Gras this week; the mayor had invited him to be part of the delegation that welcomes Rex, the Mardi Gras king. "As Frenchmen, we are attached to whatever pertains to memory," he said. "When you're raised in a house and you move away, and you pass by forty years later, you remember. It is the same with Louisiana. Katrina provoked an immediate outpouring of emotion in France that came from a feeling that this state and this city—we are attached to it. Whatever happened after the Purchase, we felt connected. This is a feeling you do not control. It was very fresh."

—Dan Baum

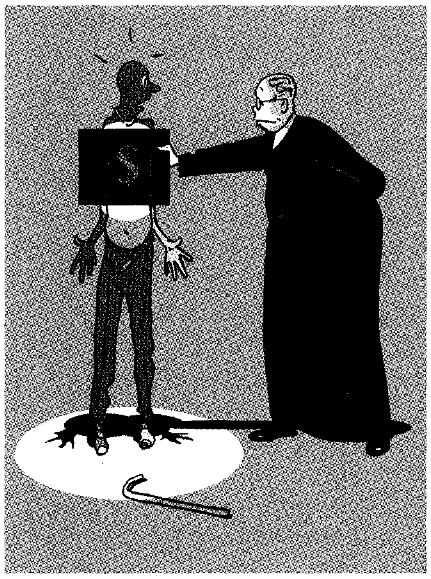
THE FINANCIAL PAGE

ASBESTOS, INC.

In the first half of the twentieth century, asbestos was known as the "magic mineral." Its strength and durability made it ubiquitous in the industrial world, as a flame retardant, insulator, and adhesive. In the United States alone, it was used in more than three thousand products—acoustic tiles, brake linings, air-conditioning systems, fireproofing. Unfortunately, asbestos also does enormous damage to the human body. In the nineteen-twenties, doctors first documented deaths from asbestosis—a scarring of the lungs caused by the inhalation of asbestos fibres—and it later became clear that asbestos was also to blame for a deadly cancer called mesothelioma. Asbestos manufacturers knew at least some of these risks before the Second World War, but hid them. This prevarication led to the deaths of tens of thousands of workers. It also laid the groundwork for one of the costliest legal battles in U.S. history. Over the past thirty years, seventy billion dollars has been spent on asbestos litigation, and more than seventy companies have been driven into bankruptcy, and yet it's far from certain that the guilty have been punished or the victims fairly compensated. This year, the Senate seemed ready to pass a bill, the Fairness in Asbestos Injury Resolution Act, that was an attempt to bring some rationality to the system. But, two weeks ago, the bill was stymied on a procedural vote. It is still alive, but at the moment asbestos litigation remains, in the words of Supreme Court Justice David Souter, an "elephantine mass."

It didn't start that way. The first asbestos lawsuit was filed in 1966, and initially most suits targeted companies that had manufactured or sold asbestos, and most plaintiffs were people who had been seriously harmed. Gradually, though, courts came to accept more expansive definitions of both liability and harm; people who had been exposed to asbestos but were currently, in legal parlance, "unimpaired" were able to collect millions in damages, and any company that had sold a product containing asbestos became a potential target. Plaintiffs didn't have to prove that such a product had actually caused them harm—the presence of an asbestos-containing product in the workplace was considered proof enough. According to a recent study by the RAND Institute for Civil Justice, more than eight thousand companies have been named as defendants.

Essentially, asbestos litigation has become an industry unto itself. The economics of the business are those of a lottery: it costs little to enter, since many claims are consolidated into large cases that don't come to trial, and the potential payoff is very high. The number of asbestos cases filed annually has escalated since the mid-nineties, and most of those cases involved people who are unimpaired. A jury in Mississippi awarded twenty-five million dollars apiece to six plaintiffs who had never spent a dollar on asbestos-related medical expenses. There are also real questions about the science behind asbestos lawsuits. In a recent study in the journal *Academic Radiology*, for instance, six independent experts who screened nearly five hundred X-rays of patients who had been given a diagnosis of asbestosis by plaintiffs' doctors found that eighty-five per cent showed no signs of the disease. That study may not be representative of all cases, but it suggests that more than a few asbestos claims are based on dubious diagnoses.



ISTVAN BANYAI

The result of all this is that the justice dispensed in asbestos cases is haphazard. Because billions of dollars have been paid to people who were not seriously injured, and because court dockets are overwhelmed with cases, it's become harder for people who are really sick to get what they deserve. Many of the trusts set up by bankrupt companies, for instance, receive so many claims that each claimant receives only a few cents on the dollar. Meanwhile, the expanded definition of corporate liability has meant that companies with only a tangential connection to asbestos have been harshly punished. This has had severe economic consequences: a study led by the economist and Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz determined that asbestos-related bankruptcies had cost more than three billion dollars and entailed the loss of more than fifty thousand jobs. The only people for whom the system works well are lawyers: according to one study, roughly sixty per cent of all the money spent on litigation has gone to attorneys.

We could try to fix this broken system, but it may make more sense to do what the Senate bill does and circumvent it entirely. FAIR would establish a trust fund administered by the government and paid for by companies that have asbestos liabilities. The money would be used to compensate victims based on the severity of their injuries, and legal fees would be capped at five per cent of the total payouts. FAIR resembles earlier programs—the funds that compensate coal miners suffering from black-lung disease, nuclear-weapons-plant workers, and uranium miners, for instance, and the Vaccine Injury Compensation Program, which protects manufacturers from suits arising from vaccine-related injuries. Trust funds are imperfect: if the number or cost of cases is higher than expected (as happened with these earlier funds), taxpayers may have to make up the difference. And, unless the medical screening required by the bill is made more rigorous, the unimpaired may still be able to profit at the expense of the truly sick. But the potential benefits are considerable: the program would do away with the crapshoot of litigation, and, by capping attorney fees, it would also reduce the incentive to manufacture cases. Ultimately, the twentieth century's ill-fated enthusiasm for asbestos was a collective disaster. It's probably time for a collective solution.

—*James Surowiecki*

ANNALS OF LAW

DRAWING THE LINE

Will Tom DeLay's redistricting in Texas cost him his seat?

BY JEFFREY TOOBIN

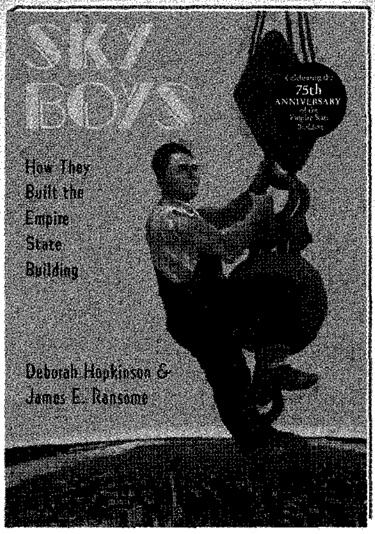
For three days in October of 2003, Tom DeLay left his duties as majority leader of the House of Representatives and worked out of the Texas state capitol, in Austin. During the previous year, DeLay had led his Republican colleagues there in an effort to redraw the boundaries of the state's congressional districts. For more than a century, congressional redistricting had taken place once every decade, after the national census, but the Texas Republicans were trying to redraw lines that had been approved just two years earlier. Several times during the long days of negotiating sessions, DeLay personally shuttled proposed maps among House and Senate offices in Austin. Once, when reporters glimpsed DeLay striding through the corridors of the state capitol, they asked him about his role in the negotiations. “I'm a Texan trying to get things done,” he said.

Before the end of the month, the Republicans had pushed their plan through both houses, and it paid off in November of 2004. The Texas delegation in the House of Representatives went from seventeen to fifteen in favor of the Democrats, to twenty-one to eleven in favor of the Republicans. Martin Frost was the third-ranking Democrat in the House when the Republicans eliminated the district he had represented for twenty-six years. “I knew what DeLay was doing,” Frost told me. “I didn't like it, but he wasn't just trying to get me, he was trying to get as many Dems as possible. I went ahead and ran in one of the other districts. It was almost impossible to win, and I didn't. But I went out with my boots on.”

The struggle over redistricting amounted to a Promethean display of political power by DeLay, and his subsequent downfall has been similarly epic. DeLay's recent travails, which include a criminal indictment in Texas last year and his resignation as majority leader, can be traced to the redistricting fight. Today, his victory in that battle looks fragile. On March 1st, the Supreme Court will hear a challenge to the Texas congressional map, and the outcome is by no means clear. In the first major case to be heard by the two new Justices, John G. Roberts, Jr., and Samuel A. Alito, Jr., the Court will weigh the constitutionality of the Texas plan, which represents just one of the partisan gerrymanders that have transformed Congress in recent years. The Republican majority in Texas and the Bush Justice Department are asking the Court to preserve the Texas plan. But DeLay's political fortunes have changed so much that, paradoxically, the best thing that could happen to him now may be for the Court to strike down the plan he created.

In cases of extreme partisanship in gerrymandering, it is often difficult to identify the original sin. The current controversy in Texas dates to the period just after the 1990 census, when Democrats still controlled both houses of the Texas legislature. Even though Texas was by that time trending strongly Republican in statewide and Presidential races, the Democrats drew district lines that enabled their party to win twenty-one seats in the House in 1992, compared with just nine for the Republicans. By the time of the next census, in 2000, the Republicans were understandably eager to redress the balance. “Republicans had been on the receiving end of what was known as the shrewdest gerrymander of the nineteen-nineties,” John Cornyn, a former Texas attorney general who is now a U.S. senator, said. “There are those who thought that what happened next was payback.”

By 2000, Republicans controlled the governorship and the State Senate, but Democrats still had a majority in the Texas House. A deadlock between the two legislative bodies prevented Texas


SKY BOYS
How They Built the Empire State Building
Deborah Hopkinson & James E. Ransome
Celebrating the 75th Anniversary of the Empire State Building

Celebrating the 75th Anniversary of the Empire State Building

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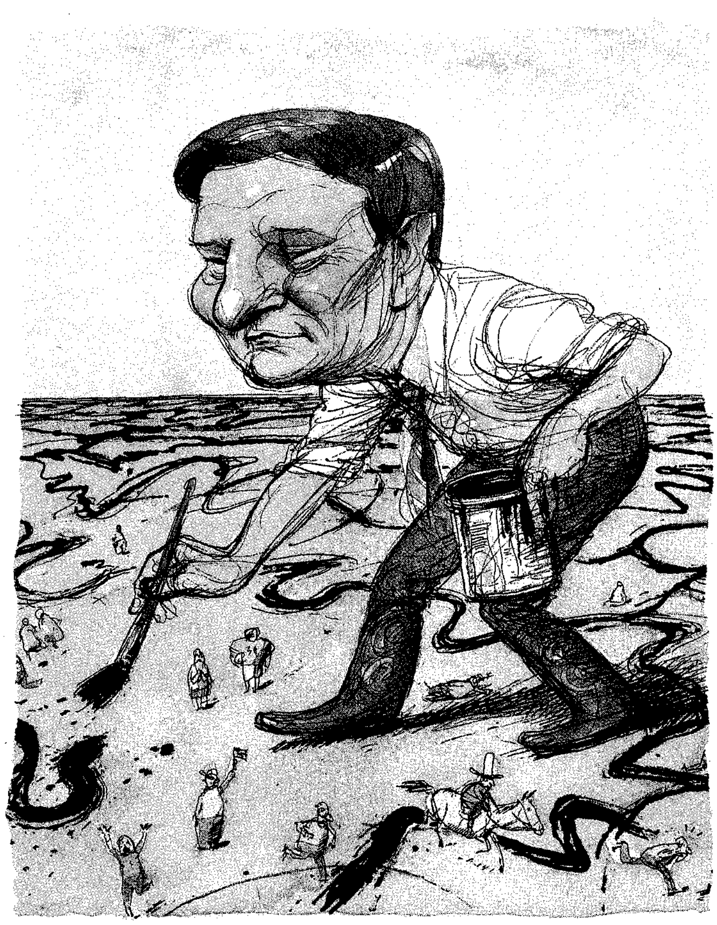
from adopting any redistricting plan, and the conflict ended up in federal court. The following year, a three-judge panel, ill-disposed to take sides in a political fight, ratified a modified version of the 1991 map, with two new seats awarded to high-growth districts. "The court essentially carried forward the 1991 Democratic gerrymander of Texas, which is increasingly problematic, given the over-all Republican tilt of the state," Samuel Issacharoff, a professor at New York University School of Law, told me. "The status-quo ante looked like a distortion."

In the 2002 elections, DeLay set out to give the Texas House a Republican majority and thus remove the last obstacle to full Republican control of the state. That year, he created two PACs, which raised and spent $3.4 million on twenty-two races for the Texas House. The law firm of Jack Abramoff, the lobbyist whom DeLay has described as one of his "closest and dearest friends," contributed twenty-five thousand dollars to the cause. On October 4, 2002, the DeLay PAC known as Texans for a Republican Majority sent a hundred and ninety thousand dollars to seven candidates for the State House. The following month, all seven were elected, and Republicans became the majority party in the Texas House.

"After the 2000 census, we never had a chance to vote on a congressional redistricting plan, because the court did it," Tom Craddick, a close ally of DeLay's, who became Speaker of the Texas House after the 2002 election, told me. "When we took over, we decided that we ought to do congressional redistricting. If we hadn't taken control, we wouldn't have gone ahead with it. Tom pushed to do it." It was true that a court, and not the legislature, had drawn the congressional maps after the 2000 census, but that had also occurred in several other states where the political branches couldn't agree on a plan. DeLay's and Craddick's idea—to redistrict in the middle of a census cycle—had never been attempted in any state. As Cornyn put it, "Everybody who knows Tom knows that he's a fighter and a competitor, and he saw an opportunity to help the Republicans stay in power in Washington."

In the spring of 2003, Texas Republicans, who were now dominant in both the State House and Senate, proposed a new congressional map that promised to add between five and seven new Republicans to the Texas delegation. At the time, DeLay said that, with fifty-seven per cent of Texas voters backing Republicans for Congress, it was only fair that the G.O.P. control more than fifteen of the thirty-two seats in the U.S. House. If a mid-census redistricting was necessary to align the seats with the popular vote, the Republicans argued, so be it.



DeLay's plan to redistrict mid-decade was unprecedented.

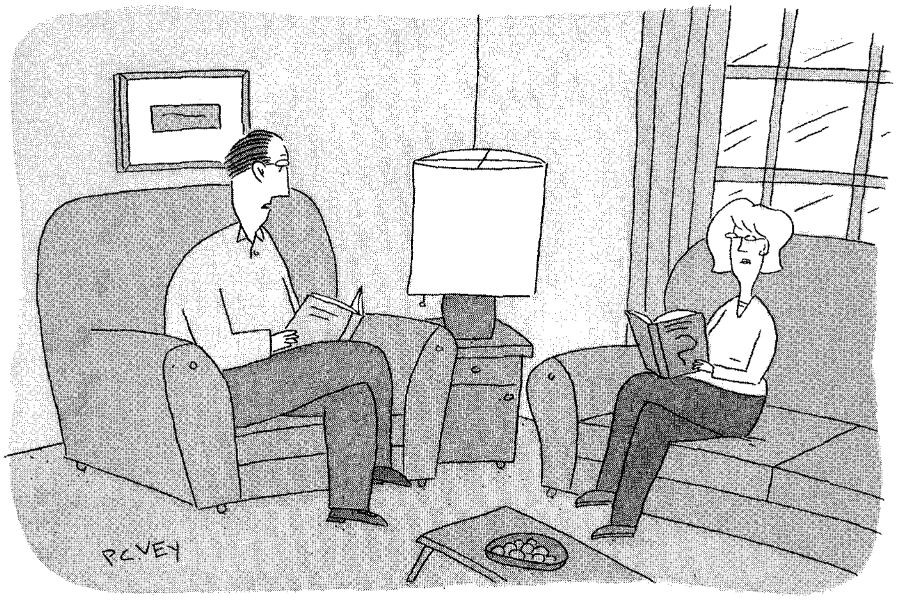
RICHARD THOMPSON

Pete Laney, the Democrat who preceded Craddick as Speaker, helped lead the opposition to the DeLay plan. "We couldn't believe what they were trying to pull," he told me. "They were looking to create chaos. Every time the legislature changed hands, they could have redistricted, every two years if they wanted to, and we didn't think it was right." Texas law required that two-thirds of the hundred-and-fifty-member body be present in order to conduct legislative business; the Democrats, who numbered sixty-two, could stop the legislation simply by not showing up. So most of them took off for Oklahoma.

There was some precedent for this kind of action in Texas. In 1979, a group of liberal state senators, known as the Killer Bees, fled the state to deprive the majority of a quorum in a dispute over the date of the Texas Presidential primary. This time, in 2003, the House Democrats were dubbed the Killer D's.

Laney was on his cotton farm, in the Texas panhandle, on May 11th when he and his Democratic colleagues decided to leave the state for the Oklahoma town of Ardmore, just across the border. Most of the legislators travelled from Austin by bus, but Laney flew in his private plane, a seven-seat Piper Cheyenne. The following day, the clerk of the Texas House issued arrest warrants for the missing politicians, and DeLay's staff decided to find them.

On the afternoon of May 12th, a senior aide to DeLay called an official with the Federal Aviation Administration and asked the agency to track the location of tail number N711RD, Laney's plane. The staffer didn't say why he wanted the information, and F.A.A. officials later said that they assumed there was a safety issue involving the plane. According to a subsequent report by the Inspector General of the Department of Homeland Security, a DeLay staffer also contacted D.H.S. "requesting assistance in determining the location of an aircraft believed to be overdue." By the end of the day, the F.A.A. had told DeLay's staff that local officials had traced the plane to Ard-



"Did you ever have that baby you wanted so much?"

more. (The same day, DeLay's staff also contacted a senior official at the Justice Department, asking whether federal law-enforcement authorities would assist in arresting the missing legislators. The Department's Inspector General later issued a report saying that another Justice official had decided that the request was "wacko," and the Department refused to get involved.)

"It didn't bother me that the F.A.A. was looking for me, because I want them to know where I am when I'm in the air," Laney said. "The chance of me surviving if I put one of those things down at three hundred miles per hour is a lot better if they can find me fast. The problem was that they misled the F.A.A. about why they were looking for me. And what really bothers me is that they had Homeland Security, the F.A.A., and the whole federal government looking for me, but it was a reporter for the Dallas *Morning News* who found us first anyway."

The Killer D's remained at the Ardmore Holiday Inn, dining at the adjoining Denny's, through May 15th, the last day that new bills could be considered. But on June 30th Governor Rick Perry convened a special session on redistricting, and, with the Democrats back in the state, DeLay's plan finally passed the House. However, eleven Democrats in the Senate, determined to deprive that body of a quorum, also decided to flee the state, this time to Albuquerque. "We considered every nearby state except Louisiana," one Texas Democratic legislator said. "They've got legalized gambling there, and riverboat casinos, and we didn't want anybody who wasn't paying attention to what they were doing."

The second holdout lasted for forty-five days, but the Democrats' unanimity cracked when Senator John Whitmire, of Houston, decided that the effort had become futile, and returned to Texas for the Labor Day weekend. That gave Republicans a quorum in the Senate, and a few weeks later DeLay went to Austin. Under his guidance, and with the upcoming Texas-Oklahoma football game in Dallas as an incentive to wrap up business, the Senate ratified the new congressional districts on October 13th. ("DELAY, LOOMING FOOTBALL WEEKEND PUT PRESSURE ON PARTY," read a headline in the Austin *American-Statesman*.)

Since the passage of the Voting Rights Act, in 1965, most legal fights about redistricting have concerned the rights of racial minorities. DeLay expected such a challenge to the 2003 Texas map, and he was ready with a preëmptive defense. "Minority rights have been protected," he said at a press conference after the plan was ratified. He asserted that the number of Hispanic representatives could grow from six to eight, and the number of African-Americans from two to three. (These predictions were, for the most part, accurate.)

From the beginning, it was evident that the agenda of the Republican mapmakers in Texas was more political than racial. Shortly after the redistricting plan passed, Joby Fortson, an aide to Representative Joe Barton, a Texas Republican, sent a candid e-mail to a group of colleagues that makes this point more clearly than any public statement issued by the participants. The memo, which was disclosed in the course of subsequent litigation, offers a "quick rundown" on each of the seats in the delegation. Fortson begins his description of the district where Martin Frost, the senior Democrat in the state, would have to run with the words "Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha. . . . His district disappeared." As for another Democratic incumbent, Nick Lampson, Fortson says, he and a G.O.P. incumbent "are drawn together in a Republican district." (Lampson lost, too.) "This is the most aggressive map I have ever seen," Fortson concludes. "This has a real national impact that should assure that Republicans keep the House no matter the national mood." (Fortson, who now works for Apple Computer, declined to comment.)

On October 14, 2003, Texas Democrats challenged the new congressional districts under the Voting Rights Act, but three months later a three-judge panel ruled that the rejiggering of the lines had not diluted the voting power of African-Americans or Hispanics. Then, in a major surprise, the Supreme Court issued an opinion that may have changed the rules of the redistricting game for good.

The Constitution established the House of Representatives as the branch of government most closely attuned to changes in the national mood. James Madison, in "The Federalist Papers," wrote that the House was conceived as a "numerous and changeable body," where smaller districts and two-year terms were sure to generate regular turnover, especially compared with the Senate. Of course, the framers also understood the rough-and-tumble of politics; even in Madison's day, the practice of gerrymandering for partisan advantage was familiar. In the late seventeen-eighties, there were claims that Patrick Henry had tried to gerrymander Madison himself out of the First Congress. The term was coined during Madison's Presidency, to mock Elbridge Gerry, the governor of Massachusetts, who in 1811 approved an election district that was said to look like a salamander. But the frequency and boldness of contemporary partisan gerrymandering make its nineteenth-century antecedents look genteel.

As a practical matter, Madison's conception of the House is now obsolete. Partisan gerrymandering has become a precise science, where mapmakers use computer data from census and election returns to design the political makeup of each congressional district. "It used to be that the idea was, once every two years voters elected their representatives, and now, instead, it's every ten years the representatives choose their constituents," Pamela Karlan, a professor at Stanford Law School, told me. Republicans currently hold a 231 to 201 advantage in the House, which means that Democrats would need to win only seventeen new seats—or about four per cent of the Congress—in order to regain the majority. But the extreme gerrymandering in most states makes the Democrats' challenge nearly impossible, even in a year when national political trends may favor them. Outside Texas, only two incumbents lost in the 2004 congressional elections, and only in twenty-one seats did the winner have less than fifty-five per cent of the vote. "Congressmen are more likely to die or be indicted than they are to lose a seat," Karlan said.

In 2004, Democrats in Pennsylvania presented the Supreme Court with a direct challenge to the practice of partisan gerrymandering. Following the 2000 census, Republicans controlled the governorship and both houses of the state legislature, so they essentially had a free hand in shaping congressional districts to their liking. The commonwealth has become more Democratic in recent years, but the G.O.P. gerrymander showed the power of creative line-drawing. In 2002, the first election to reflect district lines, Republicans won twelve of the nineteen congressional seats—even though a Democrat, Ed Rendell, was elected governor. So a group of Democratic voters filed a lawsuit, claiming that such pervasive distortions of the popular will amounted to a violation of the Constitution's guarantee of equal protection of the laws.

The case, Vieth v. Jubelirer, reached the Supreme Court, which responded with one of its most significant, and most baffling, decisions in recent history. On April 28, 2004, the Court ruled five to four that the Pennsylvania plan could stand. But in more than a hundred pages of opinions, written by five Justices, there is neither a majority opinion for the Court nor an agreement on the larger issues in the case. As a lower-court judge in the Texas case later wrote of the ruling, "The light offered by Vieth is dim, and the search for a core holding is elusive."

The lead opinion in the case, by Justice Antonin Scalia, at least has the advantage of clarity. Writing for himself, Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist, and Justices Sandra Day O'Connor and Clarence Thomas, Scalia acknowledged that the Pennsylvania plan came about because "prominent national figures in the Republican Party pressured the General Assembly to adopt a partisan redistricting plan as a punitive measure against Democrats for having enacted pro-Democrat redistricting plans elsewhere." But Scalia said that partisan gerrymandering was not a subject that belonged in federal court; rather, he wrote, the Constitution entrusts the issue to the political branches of government and "involves no judicially enforceable rights." In other words, the Scalia quartet advised the Pennsylvania Democrats to try harder to win elections instead of running to the courts with their complaints.

Four other Justices dissented, arguing that the Pennsylvania Democrats deserved their day in court. John Paul Stevens, David Souter, Ruth B. Ginsburg, and Stephen G. Breyer said, in effect, that partisan gerrymandering had got so out of hand that it was up to the courts to restore a measure of fairness. In Stevens's view, the courts should weigh in because "when partisanship is the legislature's sole motivation—when any pretense of neutrality is forsaken unabashedly and all traditional districting criteria are subverted for partisan advantage—the governing body cannot be said to have acted impartially." And the problem, Souter wrote in his dissent, keeps getting worse: "The increasing efficiency of partisan redistricting has damaged the democratic process to a degree that our predecessors only began to imagine."

One Justice, Anthony M. Kennedy, tried to split the difference. Kennedy joined the result of Scalia's opinion but not his reasoning. Unlike Scalia, Kennedy wrote, "I would not foreclose all possibility of judicial relief if some limited and precise rationale were found to correct an established violation of the Constitution in some redistricting cases." Kennedy made clear his disdain for the way that redistricting had become a partisan slugfest, noting the words of a North Carolina legislator in the midst of one such fight: "We are in the business of rigging elections." But Kennedy also identified the main problem facing those who would have the courts get involved in the redistricting process. "Because there are yet no agreed upon substantive principles of fairness in districting, we have no basis on which to define clear, manageable, and politically neutral standards," he wrote.

Kennedy's temporizing drew a mocking rejoinder from Scalia, who wrote, "Justice Kennedy's opinion boils down to this: 'As presently advised, I know of no discernible and manageable standard that can render this claim justiciable. I am unhappy about that, and hope that I will be able to change my opinion in the future.'" But Kennedy may yet have the last word, because the Texas case gives him, and the four dissenting Justices in Vieth, an opportunity to rein in partisan gerrymanders once and for all.

DeLay's problems began to accumulate even before he could savor the Republican gains in the 2004 elections in Texas. On October 6, 2004, the House Ethics Committee, in a unanimous vote of its five Republicans and five Democrats, admonished DeLay for asking the F.A.A. to track Laney's airplane during the redistricting fight the previous year. The committee's report on the incident cited House rules that prohibit members from taking "any official action on the basis of the partisan affiliation . . . of the individuals involved." DeLay's role in the matter "raises serious concerns under these standards of conduct," the report said. (It was the third time that the committee had reprimanded DeLay for breaking House rules.) DeLay was defiant, declaring in response that the complaint "should have been thrown out immediately." He went on, "For years Democrats have hurled relentless personal attacks against me, hoping to tie my hands and smear my name. All have fallen short, not because of insufficient venom, but because of insufficient merit."

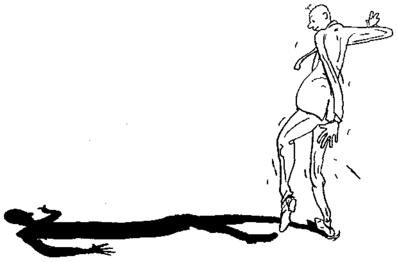
With the new congressional districts in place, Republicans gained five seats in Texas the following month. The net increase was actually six seats, because one incumbent Democrat, Ralph Hall, switched parties. But in the days immediately after the election the district attorney in Austin, a veteran Democrat named Ronnie Earle, stepped up his investigation of DeLay's fund-raising activities before the 2002 elections to the Texas legislature.

On September 28, 2005, DeLay and two close associates were indicted on charges of conspiracy and money-laundering in connection with the last-minute contribution of a hundred and ninety thousand dollars from the Texans for a Republican Majority PAC to House candidates before the 2002 elections. Texas law prohibits corporate contributions to state political campaigns, and the indictment charges that DeLay steered money that he knew was from corporations to the local candidates. His co-defendants are James W. Ellis, who runs DeLay's main national fund-raising PAC—Americans for a Republican Majority—and John Colyandro, the former director of Texans for a Republican Majority. All three defendants pleaded not guilty, and DeLay denounced Earle, the prosecutor, as "an unabashed partisan zealot." Still, under House rules the indictment meant that DeLay was required to step down as majority leader. (That blow was softened somewhat last month when House Republicans awarded DeLay a coveted seat on the Appropriations Committee, which was left vacant last November when Randy "Duke" Cunningham, a California Republican, resigned after pleading guilty to taking $2.4 million in bribes from military and other government contractors.)

DeLay will probably go to trial on Earle's charges sometime early next year, but he also remains under the scrutiny of Justice Department prosecutors in the investigation that led to the guilty plea in January by Jack Abramoff, the Republican fund-raiser and lobbyist. (The Appropriations Subcommittee, of which DeLay is also a member, sets the budget of the Justice Department.) Earle, too, has issued subpoenas in order to examine Abramoff's role in the 2002 Texas legislative elections. Yet the greatest threat to DeLay may be political, not legal.

The 2003 redistricting plan was implemented at a time when DeLay still looked invincible in Texas, so in redrawing his own congressional district in the Houston suburbs he was magnanimous toward his Republican colleagues. As the Hill aide Joby Fortson put it in his e-mail analysis of the new district lines, DeLay "gives away enough R's" to help his neighboring Republican congressman Ron Paul. As a result of his generosity, DeLay won in 2004 with only fifty-five per cent of the vote, against an underfunded and obscure Democratic opponent.

But DeLay has a serious Democratic opponent in 2006, Nick Lampson. As a congressman from 1997 to 2005, Lampson represented an adjacent district, which was eliminated in DeLay's 2003 gerrymander. Lampson has capitalized on DeLay's notoriety in his fund-raising efforts; in February, Lampson had $1.29 million on hand, DeLay $1.44 million. (DeLay told George Will that he expects the race will be the most expensive in congressional history.) To further compound DeLay's problems, a former Republican congressman, Steve Stockman, may run as an independent in the district. A recent poll shows Lampson leading DeLay by eight points, with a large number of voters undecided. "I have the luxury of being able to concentrate on issues like health care, immigration, and refinery safety," Lampson told me. "I can say I'm going to be making headlines for the right reasons. I don't have to concentrate on what he did wrong, because that's showing up in the headlines in story after story after story."



The question remains, though, whether the Supreme Court will approve the current district lines, and whether DeLay and Lampson will wind up facing each other in November. The Court has already signalled a special interest in the case: the Justices have allowed two hours for the oral arguments on March 1st, the first time the Roberts court has set aside so much time for a case. (One hour is customary.)

The Democrats, in addition to challenging the gerrymander on the ground that it is excessively partisan, have asserted that the new lines of a congressional district in the Dallas–Fort Worth area dilute African-American voting strength, in violation of the Voting Rights Act. (In his e-mail, Fortson says of this district, "This is the D's best legal challenge, as inner-city Ft. Worth will now be outnumbered in a Republican suburban district.") Still, the core of the case remains the Democrats' claim that the systematic use of redistricting to deny them a viable chance of victory violates the Constitution.

The new Justices, Roberts and Alito, have modest public records on voting-rights matters, and neither had much to say on the subject during the confirmation hearings. In Alito's now famous 1985 application for a promotion at the Justice Department, where he asserted his belief that "the Constitution does not protect a right to an abortion," he also briefly addressed voting rights. "In college, I developed a deep interest in constitutional law, motivated in large part by disagreement with Warren Court decisions, particularly in . . . reapportionment," he wrote. At the confirmation hearings, Alito rebuffed suggestions by Democrats that this statement meant that he opposed the principle of "one man, one vote," which was at the heart of the Warren-era apportionment decisions. "I do not see any reason why it ['one man, one vote'] should be reëxamined, and I do not know that anybody is asking for that to be done," Alito testified. "Every legislative district in the country and every congressional district in the country has been reapportioned, has been redistricted numerous times in reliance on the principle of 'one person, one vote,' and the old ways of organizing state legislatures have long been forgotten." Nevertheless, Roberts's and Alito's conservative orientations suggest that they may vote the way their predecessors, Rehnquist and O'Connor, did on this issue, and the decision will turn on Kennedy's vote.

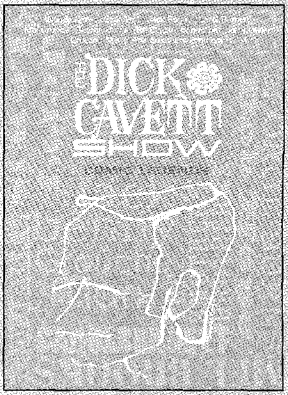
The Democrats' lawyers hope that they can win over Kennedy by pointing out differences between the Pennsylvania and Texas cases. In Pennsylvania, there was some ambiguity about the legislators' motivations for drawing the district lines where they did. The state had lost two seats because of the 2000 census, so the legislators had no choice but to rework the earlier map, and, inevitably, politics played some role in those decisions. But the Texas case is purely a matter of political gerrymandering; the Court-ordered plan of 2001 had the right number of seats, and had already gone into use, so the only reason for the 2003 reworking was to help the Republican Party. "There is little question but that the single-minded purpose of the Texas legislature in enacting [the 2003 plan] was to gain partisan advantage," the lower court in the Texas case found. "The newly dominant Republicans . . . decided to redraw the state's congressional districts solely for the purpose of seizing between five and seven seats from Democratic incumbents."

In other words, as the Democrats see it, the Texas Republicans punished their opponents solely because of their political views. "It's a well-established idea that the government shouldn't discriminate against people because of their partisanship," Paul M. Smith, the lawyer who will present the oral argument for the Democrats, said. "The government can't refuse to hire someone for a civil-service job because of their partisan view. The government can't refuse to rent out an auditorium because of the speakers' views. Here, we're saying that you have to treat redistricting the same way—that you can't punish Democrats simply because they are Democrats." On the other hand, as Texas Republicans point out, the Court may be reluctant to join in a partisan melee. "You can't take politics out of politics, and there is nothing more political than redistricting," Senator Cornyn says. Besides, as the lower court found in upholding the 2003 gerrymander, "the history of electoral politics in Texas during the latter half of the twentieth century can be described as the story of the dominance, decline, and eventual eclipse of the Democratic Party as the state's majority party." It seems reasonable for the state's congressional delegation to reflect this reality.

Still, there is one way for the Court to stake out a middle ground. Instead of striking down all partisan gerrymandering, thus sowing chaos in dozens of states shortly before the 2006 congressional elections, the Justices could say that a politically inspired mid-decade redistricting violates the Constitution. "We're simply asking for them to go back to the map the courts approved in 2001, and that Texas used in the 2002 election," Sam Hirsch, another lawyer for the Democrats, says. "It takes care of the worst of the problems, it's neat and simple, and there's no need for the courts themselves to draw district lines."

This option, which would be a major loss for the Texas Republican Party, might mean a win for Tom DeLay. Instead of running against DeLay, Nick Lampson could run in the district where he won as an incumbent in 2002. "That could certainly happen," Lampson told me. "I will have to make that decision when it actually becomes a reality." DeLay, in turn, would lose a well-financed challenger in the new district, and return to his old district, which was more Republican anyway. (DeLay declined to comment.)

Ultimately, DeLay's extremism may turn out to have been a national service, if it compels the Supreme Court to confront the problem of uncompetitive congressional elections. "I think that everybody knows this is a national scandal," says Samuel Issacharoff, of N.Y.U., who has filed a brief in support of the Democrats in the Texas case. "Every Justice has at some point said the situation is deeply wrong. They may disagree about whether the courts can do anything about it, or about how to fix the problem, but not a single member of the Court is willing to say that this is how our democracy is supposed to work." ♦



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SHOUTS & MURMURS

A MEMO FROM THE VATICAN

BY PAUL RUDNICK

From: His Holiness
To: All seminaries
Subject: While the Church approves of ordaining "transitory" homosexuals—that is, those men willing to take subways and buses rather than taxis—according to our most recent directive we "cannot admit to the priesthood those who practice homosexuality, present deeply rooted homosexual tendencies, or support the so-called 'gay culture.'" The following questionnaire should be used to help identify and root out such truly committed homosexuals.

1. Jesus would have been a bad boyfriend because:
(a) He wasn't gay or sexual in any way, so the question is disgusting.
(b) He would have cared about everyone, but not enough about you.
(c) He wasn't really Jewish.

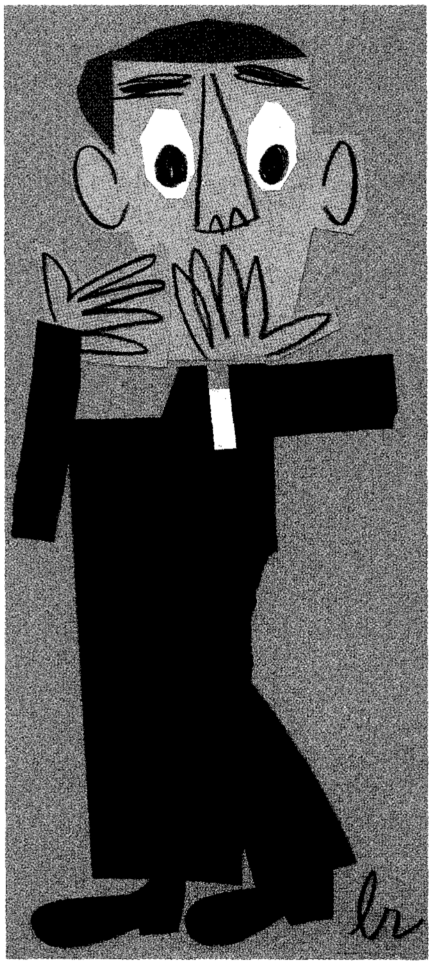
2. Priests traditionally wear black with a white collar because:
(a) The attire is simple and modest.
(b) It's slimming.
(c) The matching quilted shoulder bag is what really makes the whole thing work.

3. Priests take a vow of poverty because:
(a) It's selfless and humbling.
(b) It's handy when the check comes.
(c) It makes their apartments feel larger.

4. Should Kate Moss be allowed to take Communion?

5. If there were a Fox series set in the Vatican, it should star:
(a) Wilfred Brimley, as a wise, compassionate Pontiff.
(b) Jennifer Love Hewitt, as a lovely and devout young nun who can talk to martyrs.
(c) Me and Heath. Period.

6. If you found yourself attracted to another priest, you would:
(a) Ask him to pray with you to battle the sinful urge, over drinks.
(b) Banish all such thoughts from your mind until you lose fifteen pounds.
(c) Ask him, "What's black and white and wants your number?"



7. When you were watching "The Passion of the Christ," did you ever think, It's deeply moving and profoundly important, but it's not "Chicago"?

8. God is:
(a) All-loving and all-forgiving.
(b) All-loving and all-forgiving, sometimes.
(c) All-loving and all-forgiving, unlike white spandex tank tops.

9. Do you believe that the Ten Commandments should apply to everyone except Dennis Quaid?

10. If a couple asked you to christen their baby with the name Tiffany, would you respond, "Why don't we just call her You Big Trailer Park Whore?"?

11. Do you believe that the Church should get involved in the final round of "American Idol"?

12. If you were asked to counsel a young couple who were about to be married, would your first topic be "Everyday china"?

13. Whom would you recommend for sainthood?
(a) Mother Teresa.
(b) Mother Teresa's less popular sister, Linda.
(c) Any of Mariah Carey's personal assistants.

14. The phrase "Hate the sin but love the sinner" refers to:
(a) Homosexuals.
(b) Fried foods.
(c) Kelly Ripa.

15. Essay question: Why didn't God just destroy Sodom and Gomorrah through overgentrification?

16. In the Gnostic Gospels, which apostle is referred to as "scrumptious"? (This is a trick question, because, no matter what Luke says, it's not Mark.)

17. If your bishop asked you to take a vow of silence, what would your response be?
(a) Unquestioning obedience.
(b) To comically mime the words "Stop it!"
(c) To scribble on your notepad, "Fire!"

18. What is the difference between God and Oprah?
(a) None of God's book is true.
(b) God didn't create Dr. Phil.
(c) God still won't do "Letterman." ♦

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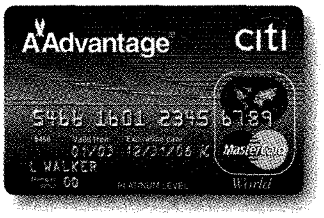

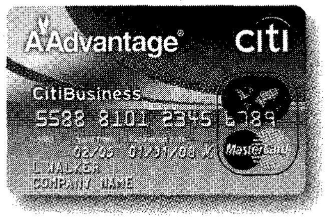

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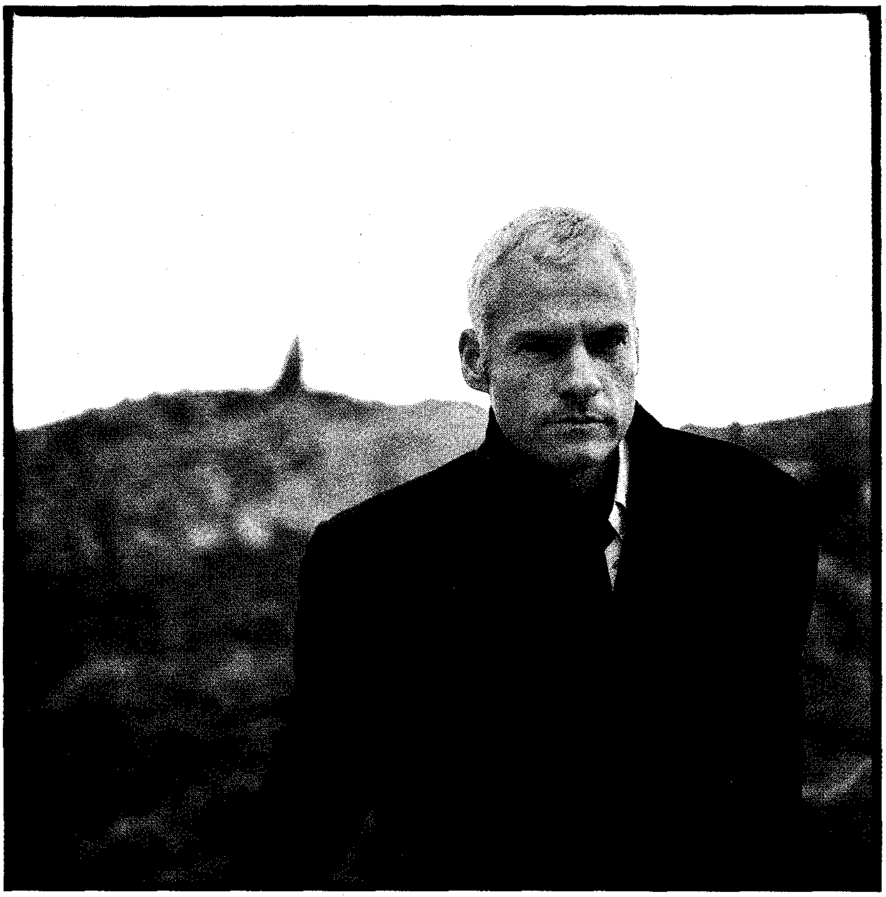
LIFE AND LETTERS

A MIND IN CONNEMARA

The savage world of Martin McDonagh.

BY FINTAN O'TOOLE

As a child, the playwright Martin McDonagh spent nearly every summer with his parents and older brother in Connemara, a rugged region on Ireland's west coast. Once, when he was six, his family boarded a curragh—a long rowboat made of slatted wood, of the sort that local fishermen have used for almost two thousand years—and made the trip from Lettermullan, the Connemara fishing village where his father grew up, to the Aran Islands, ten miles off the coast. Being on the boat surrounded by so much empty sky and water terrified McDonagh, but at the same time he was exhilarated. The landscape "always stuck in my mind," he recalled. "Just the lunar quality, the remoteness, the wildness, the loneliness of it."



McDonagh wrote his seven plays over nine months in 1994. Photograph by Steve Pyke.

Oscar Wilde described Connemara as "wild mountainous country," "in every way magnificent," and both W. B. Yeats and John Millington Synge saw it as the repository of a simpler way of life, untainted by modern vulgarity. Robert Flaherty's 1934 documentary, "Man of Aran," portrayed the local fishermen as emblems of a timeless struggle for survival in a pitiless universe. And Lucky, in his deranged monologue in Beckett's "Waiting for Godot," laments that the region's rocky terrain seems to weigh on its human inhabitants: "the stones so blue so calm alas alas on on the skull the skull the skull the skull in Connemara."

McDonagh has a less romantic conception of the place. At thirty-five, he is perhaps the most successful young playwright of the past decade—in 1997, he was widely described as the first dramatist since Shakespeare to have four works professionally produced on the London stage in a single season—and his plays, black comedies in which acts of extreme cruelty and violence are routine, are merciless rebukes to literary sentimentality. "The Cripple of Inishmaan," the first play in a loosely connected trilogy set in the Aran Islands, imagines the making of Flaherty's film and takes a sardonic view of the gap between the filmmaker's heroic imagery and the pettiness of the natives. The title of "The Lonesome West," which is part of another trilogy, this one set in the Connemara village of Leenane during the early nineteen-nineties, comes from a line in Synge's "The Playboy of the Western World": "There's sainted glory this day in the lonesome west." In McDonagh's play, Valene Connor, a neurotic bachelor, collects plastic figurines of Catholic saints, which are eventually melted in an oven by his brother, Coleman, who, shortly before the play begins, murders their father for making fun of his hair style. ("There's some insults that can never be excused," he explains.)

Another play in the Leenane trilogy, "A Skull in Connemara," turns Lucky's lament into a macabre joke: two men are hired by a priest to alleviate congestion in the parish graveyard by exhuming corpses and smashing their bones to pieces; one amuses himself with a pair of skulls, making them kiss each other and holding them up to his chest as if they were breasts. "Sure skulls are great oul things," he marvels. "It's hard to believe you have one of these on the inside of your head."

Populated by misfits and miscreants, McDonagh's Connemara is an amoral, anarchic place, where authority has crumbled; as Father Welsh, the hapless priest in "The Lonesome West," puts it, "It seems like God has no jurisdiction." In this world, an argument over potato chips or a disparaging remark about a pet cat can lead to murder and suicide. McDonagh's characters are not adults but, rather, overgrown children, who crave and rage and gloat. His plays—the two trilogies and a drama called "The

Pillowman," all of which were conceived in 1994, when McDonagh was twenty-four—display the masterly mechanics of Georges Feydeau, the richly idiosyncratic dialogue of Synge, and the gallows humor of Joe Orton. But McDonagh is a different kind of playwright; he is bloody and outlandish, a storyteller whose appeal is primarily visceral. During the London run of "The Beauty Queen of Leenane," the first play in the Leenane trilogy, audiences actually cried, "Stop! Don't do it!" as they watched Maureen, the play's long-suffering middle-aged protagonist, hold the hand of Mag, her mother, over a hot stove and douse it with boiling oil.

McDonagh himself is disconcertingly unassuming. One afternoon this winter, I met him at the Cruiscin Lan, a pub next to the harbor in Spiddal, the village in Connemara to which his parents retired, in 1992. McDonagh lives alone, in Limehouse, a trendy neighborhood in East London, in a flat overlooking the Thames which he bought with income from productions of his plays, and he spends a week each Christmas at his parents' house. McDonagh arrived at the pub in a car driven by his mother, a bright-eyed energetic sixty-year-old, who got out to shake my hand. "I would have walked down from the house, but Mum wanted to say hello," McDonagh said with a shy smile. A lean man of average height, with an alert face and close-cropped, prematurely gray hair, he speaks so softly that you have to lean in close to hear him. Everyone in Spiddal knows who he is, and, in a black T-shirt and blue pants, he stood out from the locals, who tend to wear anoraks and hefty boots. In the pub, people nodded at him and turned away, leaving him to sit in a corner undisturbed, drinking a Diet Coke. "The Martin I know is quiet, genial, funny, courteous, extremely easy to get on with," says Nicholas Hytner, the artistic director of the National Theatre in London, who staged the first production of "The Cripple of Inishmaan," in 1997. "That cruel imagination is an interior affair. It comes from somewhere that's not accessible to anyone else."

McDonagh's father, a construction worker, and his mother, a cleaner and part-time housekeeper, met and married in the nineteen-sixties, in London, where they had moved from Ireland in search of better wages. McDonagh, who was born in 1970, was the second of their two children. His relationship with his brother, John, who is two and a half years older, was intense, and was characterized, McDonagh says, by "love, love, love, and a tiny spark of hate." One of his earliest memories is of his parents berating him for getting into a fight with John, who had to be rushed to the hospital with an injured foot. The incident, McDonagh says with a laugh, "set off a strain that's been going ever since." Fraternal conflict is a recurring theme in his work: both "The Lonesome West" and "The Pillowman" revolve around the intimate, often fractious relationship of a pair of brothers. "The Lonesome West" is a wickedly comic, domestic version of Cain and Abel, in which the inability of Coleman and Valene to stop tormenting each other with spiteful games only reinforces their mutual dependence. The play reminded one friend of McDonagh's of being at a party at the playwright's home in the mid-nineteen-nineties and watching him and John have "a very serious row about who owned a toasted-cheese sandwich."

Like other working-class Irish expatriates, McDonagh's parents coped with their dislocation by trying to re-create the world of home, living among other Irish families first in Elephant and Castle, a low-rent London neighborhood, and, later, in nearby Camberwell. McDonagh remembers hearing the songs of the Irish folk group the Dubliners "blaring out from the next-door prefab." At home, his mother listened to the ballads of the Irish singer Delia Murphy, one of which, "The Spinning Wheel," is played on the radio in "The Beauty Queen of Leenane," as a special request for Mag's birthday from her daughters, soon after Maureen beats her to death with a poker. (McDonagh says that his parents "aren't crazy about the plays.")

McDonagh and his brother attended Catholic schools, where most of the teachers were Irish priests, and where most of the pupils were of Irish descent. Religious as a child, he lost his faith at the age of twelve, about the time that he began listening to his brother's punk-rock records—in particular, the raucous, anti-establishment songs of the Clash. "I

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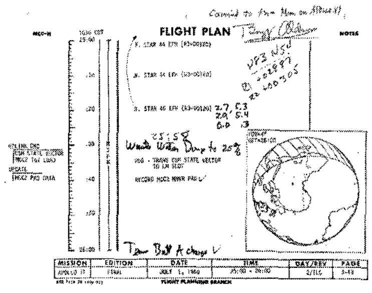
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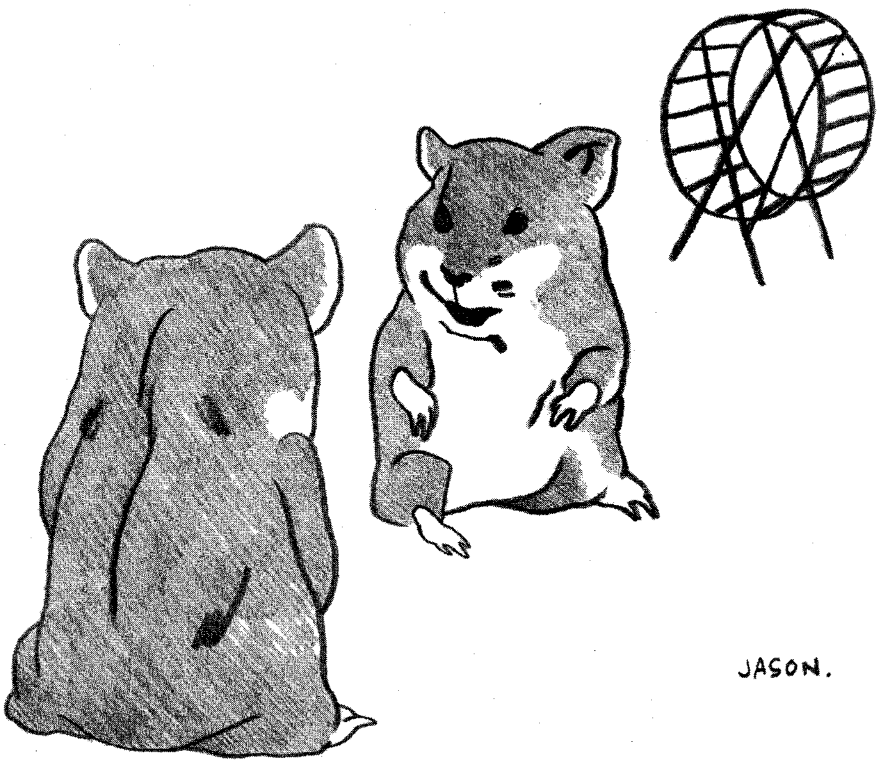


"I usually do two hours of cardio and then four more of cardio and then two more of cardio."

• •

started questioning, partly as a reaction to just being around priests in my school," he said. "None of them were particularly vicious or spiteful to me, but you could see it with other kids. Some of them were nice, some of them were thugs." McDonagh's recollection of the abusive priests is put to typically comic use in "The Beauty Queen of Leenane," in which Ray Dooley, a twenty-year-old slacker, complains that "it's usually only the older priests go punching you in the head. I don't know why. I suppose it's the way they were brought up."

McDonagh's parents encouraged him and John to play traditional Irish sports, like hurling, but they refused. Their father had grown up speaking Gaelic, and the brothers heard the language for six weeks in the summer, when they visited their father's family in Connemara, and occasionally in London, when aunts and uncles came to stay. Their father tried to teach them a few words, but they quickly forgot them. The conflict in Northern Ireland entered its bloodiest phase during McDonagh's childhood and, though his parents were sympathetic to the Catholic nationalist side, he was deeply suspicious of the terror campaign of the Irish Republican Army and of the sentimental cult surrounding the men who died for the cause. "Even from an early age, I was trying to think about all that stuff myself," he said. "I was always coming from a left-wing or pacifist or anarchist angle that started with punk, and which was against all nationalisms."

The Clash had taught him to be skeptical of authority, but the Pogues, a London Irish punk band that combined the raw aggression of the Sex Pistols with the lyrical storytelling of traditional Irish ballads, provided a more valuable lesson: they showed him that he didn't have to discard his Irish heritage; he could make use of it instead. "Even while they were trying to destroy the crap side of Irish folk, they still had brilliant lyrics, brilliant tunes, and a love of music," McDonagh said. "Maybe not consciously, I was beginning to get the same idea: taking the parts you love and destroying the parts you hate."

Just as the Pogues set harsh new lyrics to old Irish tunes, McDonagh's plays subject the pieties of Irish Catholicism and nationalism to impudent satire. Father Welsh, the priest in "The Lonesome West," is so ineffectual at enforcing moral standards that his parish becomes, as he complains, "the murder capital of fecking Europe." He consoles himself with whiskey and Coleman's reassurances that, unlike "half the priests in Ireland," he doesn't abuse children. Padraic, the antihero of "The Lieutenant of Inishmore," the second play in the Aran Islands trilogy, is a member of an I.R.A. splinter group who, with unflinching enthusiasm, tortures and dismembers his victims but dotes on his pet cat. He reserves his moral indignation for the suggestion, from a young woman who fancies him, that he is more attracted to boys than to girls: "I do not prefer boys! There's no boy-preferers involved in Irish terrorism, I'll tell you that! They stipulate when you join."

Admirers have ascribed McDonagh's power as a satirist to his vantage point as an Irishman who grew up in England. "No one who isn't Irish could have caught that world so dead-on right," Nicholas Hytner told me. "But there is in Martin also a kind of alert, sarcastic, cocky, South London street voice—the side of him that is ruthless with sentimentality. That's something that is much more Camberwell than Connemara." The plays are quite literally mongrels: they are written in an English that uses Gaelic syntax and yields oddly coiled sentences like "When it's there I am, it's here I wish I was, of course," and they exhibit an acute self-consciousness about language. When Valene, the obsessive brother in "The Lonesome West," appears onstage for the first time, he holds up a figurine of a saint, and, awestruck, utters one word: "Fibreglass." The vignette was inspired by McDonagh's memory of passing a block of flats in Galway with his father's Irish-speaking brother Mike, who saw the word printed on some building materials and repeated it aloud. "It was just such a joy in the sound of the word," McDonagh said. "I put it into the character's mouth and it freezes him in place."

McDonagh's fascination with language and stories is entirely explicit in "The Pillowman," his most original and theatrically ambitious drama, which won Britain's Olivier Award for best new play in 2004. It features a writer named Katurian, who lives in an unnamed dictatorship and is being interrogated by the police about a series of grisly murders of children that may or may not have been inspired by the stories he writes in quiet obscurity and tells to his brain-damaged older brother. "The *only* duty of a storyteller is to tell a story," he tells his interrogators. But the stories take on a life of their own, both onstage, where they are enacted in vivid, cartoon-like sequences, and in the outside world, where someone seems to be carrying out the lurid and ingenious murders they describe. (In one case, a girl is force-fed apples laced with razor blades; in another, a boy's toes are cut off, and he bleeds to death.)

For Katurian's disabled brother, Michal, the tales, like that of the giant Pillowman, who saves children from cruelty and abuse by helping them to commit suicide, have a logic independent of adult notions of right and wrong. The stories follow a childlike imperative, according to which more is always better, real suffering is inconceivable, and the only important question is: What happens next? The audience, too, wants to know where the stories lead, even as it suspects that with every twist the plot will become more gruesome.

McDonagh, referring to a scene in "The Lieutenant of Inishmore" in which three people have their eyes shot out with an air gun before they are killed by the psychotic Padraic, said, "I didn't set out wanting a scene in which those things happened to those people, but if you create the logic of that story it's going to end up in that dark place. The characters are going to converge like the iceberg and the Titanic."

McDonagh went to the theatre for the first time in 1984, when he was fourteen. He had loved Al Pacino in "The Godfather" and "Dog Day Afternoon," so he saved up enough money to buy a ticket to see the actor on the London stage, in a production of David Mamet's "American Buffalo." Pacino's manic, swaggering, self-mocking performance, and Mamet's demotic arias, in which banal squabbles acquire an epic momentum, impressed him, but, at the time, he was less interested in theatre than in film. When he went to the theatre again, it was in 1986, to see Martin Sheen, whom he had loved in "Badlands," and who was playing the lead role in a London production of Larry Kramer's "The Normal Heart."

McDonagh's brother left school at seventeen, intending to be a writer, and started to live on welfare. (He is now a screenwriter—his script "Ned Kelly" was made into a film, which was released in 2003, with Heath Ledger in the title role.) As soon as McDonagh turned sixteen, he did the same. "I didn't know what I wanted to do," he said. "I didn't want to educate myself toward some kind of job. I didn't even want a job. I didn't want a boss." His mother insisted that he find work, and he would go on interviews for menial jobs and make his lack of interest so apparent to prospective employers that he would not be hired. Subsisting happily on fifty dollars a week in unemployment benefits, he played snooker, watched television, and read books that John brought home. "Every book or piece of music I listened to was something that he liked first," he said. McDonagh particularly liked the novels of Vladimir Nabokov and the stories of Jorge Luis Borges. "Maybe it was best that I hadn't really been forced into reading books I didn't like at school, because I retained a love of literature," he said. "I read everything I could find by Borges straight through, and that got me going in terms of storytelling. And of thinking outside of your own little locale, thinking you can set a story in space, or in 1800 in Paraguay."

When he was sixteen, he told John a story based on an old folktale: A lonely little boy is on a bridge at dusk when a sinister man approaches. The man is driving a cart on the back of which are foul-smelling animal cages. The boy conquers his fear, offers the man some of his supper, and the two sit and talk. Before the man leaves, he says that he wants to give the boy something whose value he may not understand but will soon come to appreciate. The boy accepts. The man takes a meat cleaver from his pocket and chops off the toes of the boy's right foot. As the man drives away, he tosses the boy's toes to the rats that have suddenly

"I guess I've just always tried to see the good in rich people."

begun to gather in the gutters of the town, whose name, we now learn, is Hamelin. The man is the Pied Piper, who saves Hamelin from the plague but kidnaps the local children when the town's elders refuse to compensate him for his efforts. The boy is the only one of Hamelin's children to survive, because he cannot keep up with the other kids, who follow the Piper out of town.

John liked the story, so McDonagh wrote it down. "That was the first time I thought, This seems like something someone should have thought of before, but it's not, it's mine," he said. (A version of the tale appears in "The Pillowman.") After a year and a half, his welfare payments ran out, and he found work stacking shelves in a supermarket. He quit as soon as he became eligible for the dole again. Eventually, he got a part-time job as an administrative assistant in the Department of Trade and Industry, but he drifted into his early twenties without acquiring either a girlfriend or a career. However, the tedium of his job was ultimately motivating. "It made me think, I have to do something, because I don't want to be stuck here for the rest of my life," he said.

In 1992, when McDonagh was twenty-two, his father retired and his parents returned to Ireland, leaving him and John alone in the house in Camberwell. The brothers bought a videocassette recorder and watched films like "Taxi Driver," "Mean Streets," and "Goodfellas." They also watched television indiscriminately—everything from soap operas to BBC productions of plays, including Harold Pinter's "The Birthday Party" and "The Dumb Waiter." Pinter intrigued McDonagh: "I could see that he was using dialogue for its own sake, not just to convey information or carry the plot, and I was drawn to the sinister aspects of the writing."

By this time, he had written about a hundred and fifty of his grotesque tales. He obtained a list of film companies from the Arts Council and began to send them the stories. A video artist responded enthusiastically and tried to raise money to make some of them into short films. Nothing came of the project, but McDonagh was sufficiently encouraged to keep writing. He worked on radio dramas, film scripts, and stage plays, in which he tried to emulate Mamet or Pinter. None of them were very good, but he began to think of himself as a writer.

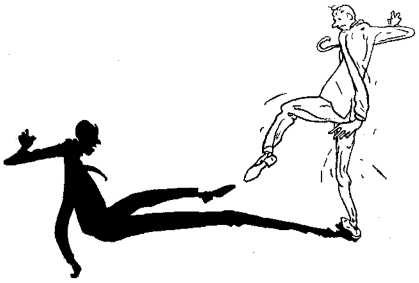
In 1994, John won a fellowship to study screenwriting at the University of Southern California and moved to Los Angeles. McDonagh quit his job at the Department of Trade and Industry and, alone in the house in Camberwell, began to write every day. In nine months, he produced drafts of seven plays—his entire dramatic corpus. (Only one of the plays has not been staged: "The Banshees of Inisheer," which, McDonagh says, "isn't any good.") Each morning, after eating a bowl of bran flakes, he would sit in his bedroom, at a child's desk facing a window with a view of a bleak concrete yard, and write with a pencil in a spiral notebook. He would begin by making a mark in the notebook two pages ahead of where he had left off the previous night. Then he would listen to the voices in his head, voices that spoke not in Mamet's caustic American or in Pinter's terse London English but in the looping locutions of Connemara. McDonagh felt almost as though he were taking dictation. He would hear Pato Dooley, Maureen's would-be lover in "The Beauty Queen of Leenane," speaking in a voice not unlike his father's, describing his life as a construction worker in England: "And when I'm over there in London and working in rain and it's more or less cattle I am, and the young fellas cursing over cards and drunk and sick, and the foul digs over there, all pee-stained mattresses and nothing to do but watch the clock."

He heard two brothers alone in their dead parents' home arguing about potato chips:

"I'm not getting some crisps taste exactly the same, cost double, Coleman."

"They don't taste the same and they have grooves."

"They do taste the same and feck grooves."



"Taytos are dried fecking filth and everybody knows they are."

"The crisp expert now I'm listening to. What matter if they're dried fecking filth? They're seventeen pee, and whose crisps are they anyways? They're my crisps."

The voices amused him, and he often talked to them. "I felt like I was trying to keep up with Valene and Coleman and their nonsense, or Mag and Maureen," McDonagh said. "But they'd be coming out with it so fast, I'd be 'O.K., stop talking. I have to get this down.' " He would write for two hours, until he reached the mark he had made in his notebook, then, after a short break, make another mark and fill up those pages, too.

In the afternoon, he would watch soap operas on television. The shows seeped into his plays, as if his characters were watching along with him, but, more important, they taught him technique. By now, he had read dozens of plays, but he had seen only half a dozen onstage. Yet his drafts reveal a sure grasp of the mechanics of dramatic narrative—an understanding of how to move characters in and out of scenes gracefully, plant crucial information in seemingly insignificant scenes early on, and, conversely, hide information by presenting it at times when the audience is distracted by a joke or an episode of violence.

McDonagh wrote every day, seldom leaving the house and hardly speaking to anyone. The night he finished his first play, "The Beauty Queen of Leenane," he went to a night club. As he stood on a balcony, looking down at couples kissing, he didn't feel jealous. "I may not have a girlfriend, but I have 'The Beauty Queen,' " he said to himself. He knew that the play was a success, that its action had a clear, uncluttered flow that could sweep an audience along—if it ever found an audience. He started to send his plays to theatre companies. Most did not respond. In the spring of 1995, Garry Hynes, the director of the Druid Theatre, in Galway, found herself "sitting down one night after dinner at home, with the script of 'A Skull in Connemara.' As soon as I read the dialogue, I wanted to hear it, to the degree that I started reading it aloud to myself. I very clearly remember reading it aloud and throwing myself on the

THAT LIGHT ONE FINDS IN BABY PICTURES

1.
Being born is a shame—

But it's not so bad, as journeys go. It's not the worst one
We will ever have to make. It's almost noon

And the light now clouded in the courtyard is
Like that light one finds in baby pictures: old

And pale and hurt—

2.
When all roads are low and lead to the same
Place, we call it *fate* and tell ourselves how

We were born to make the journey. Who's
To say we weren't?

3.
The clouded light has changed to rain.
The picture—no, *the baby's* blurry.

4.
That's me, the child playing in the sand with a pail
And shovel; in the background, my mother's shadow

Is crawling across a soot-blackened collapse of brick
And timber, what might have been a bathhouse once.

The tide is coming in. Someone has written "HELL"
On its last standing wall.

—*Jay Hopler*

floor in paroxysms of laughter." She called McDonagh, and asked to see his other plays. He sent her the rest of the Leenane trilogy, and Hynes immediately bought the rights to produce all three.

"The Beauty Queen of Leenane" opened in Galway in February, 1996. McDonagh arrived several weeks beforehand, to attend rehearsals, and while he was there Hynes and the actors in the cast took him out to dinner. It was McDonagh's first meal in a fancy restaurant. One of the actors ordered tzatziki, and McDonagh, who had never tasted it, was deeply impressed and, for the first time, aware of his lack of social experience. He was wary of being in the limelight. When Hynes was preparing the playbill for "Beauty Queen," she gave him a draft of his biographical note. "He said, 'I don't want any biography, I don't want any attention,'" she recalled. "I remember saying, 'Martin, if you don't put in any biography, there's going to be a lot more attention than if you do.'"

Nine months later, he received the Most Promising Playwright Prize at the London *Evening Standard* Theatre Awards ceremony, which was held at the Savoy Hotel. "I was so nervous at having to collect it that myself and my brother got tanked up on vodka, and the vodka really kicked in by the time we arrived at the Savoy," he said. "And we were a little bit rowdy when they started toasting the Queen, good Irish boys that we were. And Sean Connery came over and told us to shut up and I told him to fuck off. He backed away and we left, and I can't remember a single thing about the rest of the event. Apparently I kissed Jessica Lange, but I have no memory of that whatsoever."

McDonagh awoke the next day to find himself the subject of a national scandal. ("IRISH WRITER CURSES BOND AT ARTS BASH" a headline in the *Daily Mirror* read.) Initially, he welcomed the notoriety; it gave him a persona to hide behind, that of the drunken, volcanic Irish writer, a familiar stereotype. He also earned a reputation for arrogance by repeatedly declaring his indifference to most plays other than his own. "I always thought theatre was the least interesting of the art forms," he told me when I first met him, in 1997. "I'd much rather sit at home and watch a good TV play or series than go to the theatre."

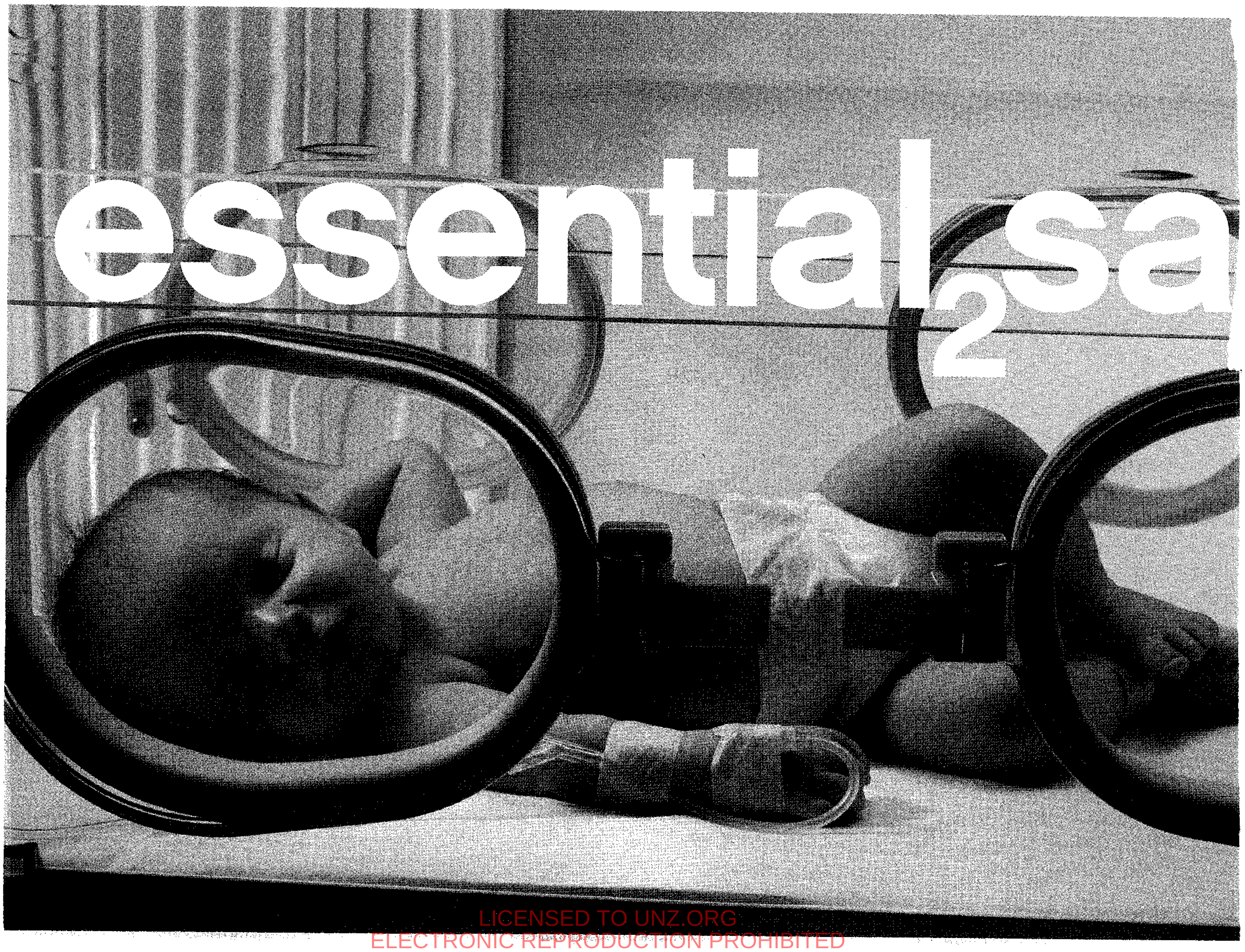
In the late nineteen-nineties, the Druid, the Royal Court, and the National—theatres that had produced his work in the past—refused to stage "The Lieutenant of Inishmore," whose graphic depiction of torture, murder, and dismemberment, even within the framework of a madcap farce, was deemed both offensive and politically insensitive. Written before the peace process gained momentum in Northern Ireland, it presents a savage critique of Irish-nationalist terrorism and was intended to provoke. "I was trying to write a play that would get me killed," McDonagh said. "I had no real fear that I would be, because the paramilitaries never bothered with playwrights anyway, but if they were going to start I wanted to write something that would put me top of the list." In part, the play was motivated by rage at the I.R.A.'s tactics—the group's willingness to kill innocent civilians in order to make a political point—but he admits that he was equally inspired by a desire to test the limits of dramatic storytelling.

McDonagh retaliated by announcing in the press that he would submit no new plays until "The Lieutenant" was produced. In November, 2000, *Harpers & Queen* published a series of photographs by David Bailey of famous thirty-year-olds, including McDonagh. In a caption, McDonagh denounced the Royal Court and the National for lacking the courage to stage the play. Simon Reade, then the literary manager of the Royal Shakespeare Company, saw the photograph and approached McDonagh's agent, asking for a copy of "The Lieutenant." It opened at the R.S.C. in May, 2001, and was a critical and popular success. Mark Lawson, writing in the *Guardian*, said that the play "made me shade my eyes and worry about seeing my lunch again. It's theatrically gross but also thrillingly written and politically challenging." The fruits of his miraculous year made McDonagh seem, in public, amazingly prolific. In truth, however, his insistence on seeing "The Lieutenant of Inishmore" onstage before delivering more work obscured the fact that he had none to offer. He was terrified that the deluge of voices and stories that had come over him in 1994 had been an anomaly. "I did so much stuff in that year that I'd been worried that that was my writing time, that was it," he said.

The fear abated somewhat when, after the London run of "The Lieutenant," he returned to his 1994 draft of "The Pillowman" and began to rework it. The play, which premièred at the National Theatre, in November, 2003, has since been produced in Tokyo and in New York, where it received six Tony nominations. It remains the case, however, that McDonagh has not written a new play in more than a decade.

During this time, his life has changed dramatically. His plays have made him wealthy, and, in addition to his luxury apartment on the Thames, he has acquired a closet full of elegant, quietly expensive clothes. He travels frequently for pleasure, following the Irish national soccer team to games abroad. And though he is now single, he has had girlfriends. Recently, he has begun writing screenplays. In 2004, he directed his first film, "Six Shooter," a twenty-seven-minute short in which a bereaved man, played by Brendan Gleeson, encounters a young psychopath on a train, leading to a Wild West-style shoot-out. McDonagh found the experience extremely stressful. As a playwright, he did not deal directly with the actors and stagehands who produced his work. On the set of "Six Shooter," he was responsible for a cast and crew of twenty. He struggled with his shyness, his lack of technical expertise, and the need to think in images as well as in words. In January, the film, which was shown in art-house cinemas in England and Ireland, and on Irish television, received an Oscar nomination for best live-action short, and it will have a limited release in the United States. Next year, McDonagh will direct his first full-length feature, "In Bruges," about two hit men who take refuge in the Belgian city after accidentally killing a child.

Two months ago, McDonagh flew to New York to attend rehearsals for the American première of "The Lieutenant of Inishmore," which opens



at the Atlantic Theatre Company on February 27th. For five weeks, he sat in the rehearsal room, at a small wooden table to the right of the director, Wilson Milam, in a state of high anxiety. He stared at the actors, pursed his lips, narrowed his eyes, and nervously rubbed his forehead. He often frowned as if displeased by what he was observing. One afternoon, the costume designer, Theresa Squire, and her assistants proposed that Domhnall Gleeson, the actor who plays Davey, a gormless seventeen-year-old who has the task of caring for the terrorist's cat, Wee Thomas, wear a T-shirt bearing the logo for "Cat Scratch Fever," a recording by the heavy-metal band Motorhead. The costume designers were excited by the idea; the song's title, they pointed out, could be understood as an allusion to Wee Thomas, and during one scene Davey sings a few lines of another Motorhead song. McDonagh, however, didn't appreciate the cleverness. Davey is "not cool," he said. "He rides around on his mammy's bike. This looks like it's striving to be a heavy-metal look. He doesn't have heavy-metal friends. What shops could he go to to buy this kind of stuff? It's just saying too much."

In another scene, David Wilmot, who plays Padraic, crouched over Andrew Connolly, one of his would-be assassins, whom he has shot and is about to torture with a long-bladed knife. When David Brimmer, the fight director, suggested that Wilmot move the knife in such a way as to give the audience the impression that he's about to cut Connolly's ear off, McDonagh objected. "No, the ears are so 'Reservoir Dogs.' "

"Why don't I bite his ear off?" Wilmot asked.

McDonagh shook his head. "It's going too far. It's being too specific."

The Atlantic's production of "The Lieutenant" represents the end of a chapter for McDonagh. His other works (with the exception of the never-produced "Banshees of Inisheer") have all been staged in New York. "It's the last play that's been performed elsewhere that hasn't been performed here," he said. He insists that he has no intention of writing another play.

"I think I've said enough as a young dramatist," he said. "Until I've lived a little more, and experienced a lot more things, and I have more to say that I haven't said already, it will just feel like repeating the old tricks." For a moment, McDonagh looked disconsolate. But he sounded hopeful. "I want to just write for the love of it," he said. "And also grow up, because all the plays have the sensibility of a young man." At the end of "The Pillowman," Katurian, his alter ego, is executed by his interrogators. But his stories survive—"a fact which," Katurian says at the play's conclusion, "would have ruined the writer's fashionably downbeat ending, but was somehow . . . somehow . . . more in keeping with the spirit of the thing." ♦

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A REPORTER AT LARGE

EXILES

How Iran's expatriates are gaming the nuclear threat.

BY CONNIE BRUCK

On a snowy mid-December day, Reza Pahlavi, the forty-five-year-old son of the deposed Shah of Iran, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, was seated at a table by the fire at a popular country-French restaurant in Georgetown, enjoying a bowl of cassoulet and plotting the overthrow of the Islamic Republic of Iran. He was accompanied by Shahriar Ahy, who in the months before the 1979 Iranian revolution had been an informal liaison between the Shah and the White House; after the Shah died, in exile, in 1980, Ahy remained close to Reza, whom many refer to as "the young shah." By early 2004, Ahy, who had been running a multinational media company from Saudi Arabia, had left his job to work full time on unseating the Iranian regime. Although Ahy says that he has no factional affiliations, he has become, in essence, Pahlavi's political strategist, mentor, speechwriter, monitor. He is also attempting, on Pahlavi's behalf, to unite the atomized Iranian opposition. Ahy, an M.I.T. graduate-school alumnus, is often compared to his fellow-alumnus Ahmad Chalabi, who, before the American invasion of Iraq, was the head of the Iraqi National Congress. An Iranian-American political activist with ties to Ahy and Pahlavi commented recently, "If Reza is ever returned to power, it will be because of Shahriar."

At lunch, as long as Pahlavi stayed on well-marked if somewhat platitudinous terrain, Ahy concentrated on the plate of calf's brain before him. But when Pahlavi seemed to veer off course Ahy's head jerked slightly. At one point, Pahlavi became quite excited, saying, "Maybe what happened twenty-six years ago is a blessing in disguise." Ahy, frowning, waited for him to finish his thought, and Pahlavi continued, "I don't think we could have had the appreciation for democratic values we have come to today. It's by losing democracy that we have come to value it." Ahy said, "You know what Churchill said when told that his loss in the 1945 election was a blessing in disguise." He glanced at Pahlavi. "He said, 'It is *quite effectively* disguised.'"

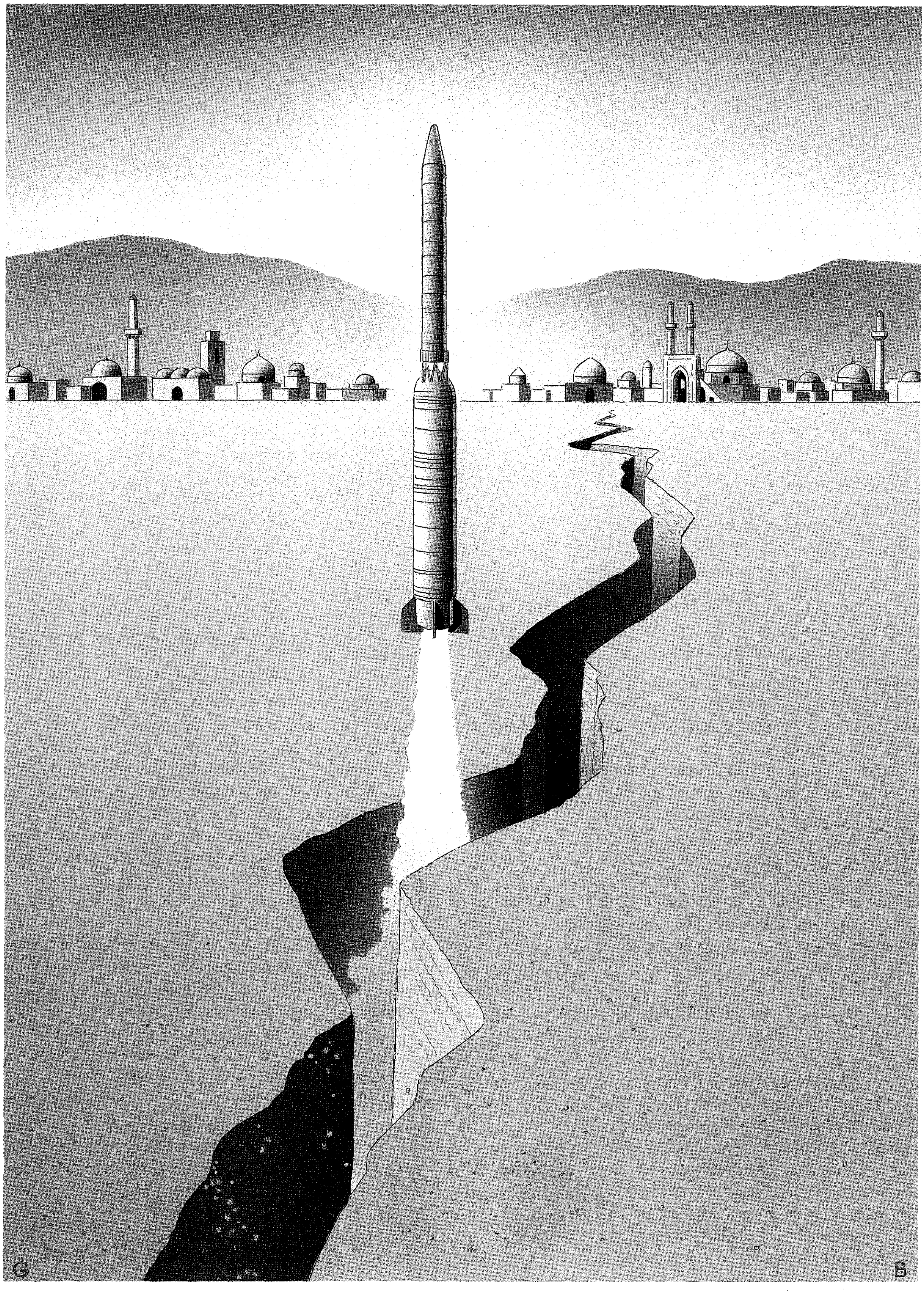
A front-page story in the Washington *Post* that morning reported that Iran's President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, had called the extermination of six million Jews during the Second World War a "myth." The week before, at a conference of Islamic nations in Saudi Arabia, he had said that, if the Europeans had supported the creation of Israel because of guilt over their actions against Jews, they should give the Jews a country in Europe instead. "We have been trying to tell the world, 'This is who this regime is,'" Pahlavi said, with grim satisfaction. "What you see here is the most extreme—not the smiling face of Khatami." Mohammad Khatami, the former President of Iran, who was elected as a reformist in 1997, had made overtures to the U.S., at one point calling for "a dialogue of civilizations," but his efforts at reform were stymied at home by a conservative backlash. Pahlavi went on, "Now the veil finally comes off!"

For years, the Iranian opposition has been so beset by factionalism that it has defied efforts at mobilization. Pahlavi insists that those days are past. Ahy is organizing a national congress, built around the Iran referendum movement, which calls for a nationwide vote on changing the constitution in order to make Iran a secular state. The two men stress that, with international pressure building over Iran's nuclear program, and with Bush's second term winding down, 2006 is the critical year. "Today, it is not 'You are a monarchist,' 'You are a republican,' 'You are a Marxist'—we are all in the same boat, fighting a common enemy," Pahlavi said. "We are getting very close, thank God. From what I hear from the activists, the walls of resistance are slowly dissipating, but it is still among the political élite and the intelligentsia. The message has yet to trickle down. So the opposition *has* to have broadcasting capability. If we had a wish list for Christmas, that would be on it."

Ahy spends nearly all his time travelling through Europe and the Middle East, recruiting Iranian dissidents. Pahlavi said that eighty per cent of his time is spent communicating with activists inside Iran: "I tell them this is not an open-ended debate. We have a time line of six months. Now, there can be no predicting—will there be preëmptive strikes, either by Israel or by the U.S.? It's the absence of a homegrown alternative that causes the world to take drastic steps. But we have to tell the world that we have this alternative—shame on us if we don't!" According to Ahy, the national congress will be convened by summer, to be followed by a huge civil-disobedience campaign throughout Iran. "All have to coöperate to bring the regime down," he said. "We would have five, six, seven clusters inside, coördinated for unity of action. So, at the same time, the Kurds would be doing this! The oil workers striking over here! So the wolves are not running after different zebras."

In the past few months, Pahlavi and Ahy have met with leftists and with ethnic minorities. They have been excoriated for this by the monarchists, who are their core constituency, because many of these groups have separatist ambitions, which have been encouraged by the recent political victories of the Kurds in neighboring Iraq. For the nationalistic Persians—who have dominated Iran since Pahlavi's grandfather Reza Shah came to power, in 1925, and solidified their control over the minorities—Iran's territorial integrity is sacrosanct. Ahy defended Pahlavi: "He's talking to Kurds, to guerrilla forces, to the left—he's having a great time with them! What he's trying to do is say, 'We are one people, we are going to have to sit next to each other in a congress—the most important thing is to talk to each other.'" Last September, Pahlavi had dinner in Berlin with some of the leftists who had

GUY BILLOUT



To some strategists, Iran's becoming a nuclear state is the worst thing that could happen. To others, it's simply inevitable.

helped to overthrow his father, and it generated outrage on both the left and the right. Ahy said, "For two months, all these Web sites were filled with things like 'How could you possibly sit with *him*?'"

The issue of having designs on the throne dogs Pahlavi, no matter how much he tries to dispel it. He insists that his "sole mission" is to bring democracy to Iran, and that the Iranian people will then decide whether they want a democratic republic or a constitutional monarchy. His role model is King Juan Carlos of Spain, who is also a friend. "In his heart, he wants to be king," an Iranian-American dissident who has known Reza since he was a boy says. "And the Iranian people are not fools—they know it. It would be better if he said it outright."

I had last seen Pahlavi six months earlier, in Los Angeles, home to some six hundred thousand Iranian expatriates, and a monarchist stronghold. Many there still dream of recovering all that they lost in 1979. Others have rebuilt their lives and businesses but, even so, remain emotionally transfixed by the memory of their loss. A former chief executive of a major company in Iran recalled how he telephoned his secretary from Europe when the regime fell and was told, "There is an ayatollah sitting behind your desk."

In order to demonstrate his ties with dissidents in Iran, Pahlavi was appearing at a rally outside the Federal Building in West Los Angeles on June 12th, several days before the first round of the elections that made Ahmadinejad President; the monarchists and some allied groups, who were calling for Iranians to boycott the elections, had organized a rally and hunger strike in solidarity with political prisoners in Iran. The rally was scheduled to last three days, with Pahlavi fasting the whole time, but his security people decided that protection was inadequate, and he appeared at length only on the third day, drawing a crowd of about five hundred, rather than the hoped-for thousands. Still, the demonstrators made up for their small numbers with their fervor. Standing at the microphone, Pahlavi, whose countenance is somewhat reminiscent of his father's, but more open, and whose manner is diffident, said, in Farsi, "I have no aspirations to be shah, I have no aspirations to be President, I want to help for the liberation of Iran." But the crowd kept chanting, "Our leader is Pahlavi, Reza, Reza Pahlavi!" A man crossed the security line to pose for a picture with Pahlavi, who was seated on the dais; then he bowed low, and kissed Pahlavi's hand.

In Georgetown, I told Pahlavi that I had heard from many of his compatriots that they would consider him a more acceptable opposition leader if he would simply renounce the throne. "I won't make a decision," Pahlavi responded. "It's not up to me. If there's a monarchist who wants the option of constitutional monarchy, what right do I have to foreclose that option?"

"He would be infringing on *my* rights," Ahy chimed in.

Ahmadinejad's invective and his determination to resume his country's nuclear program have increased the pressure on the Bush Administration to formulate, at last, a comprehensive Iran policy—something that it failed to do in its first term, because of interagency disagreements and because of its preoccupation with the war in Iraq. During that period, the various opposition groups' hopes of returning to Iran rose and fell as the Administration's policymakers clashed over their assessments of Iran's vulnerability and U.S. options. Once again, as had been the case with Iraq, the officials were trying to make sense of a place that was altogether foreign and, to many of them, inscrutable. Indeed, Iran was even more of a tabula rasa—the U.S. had had no diplomatic relations with Iran since 1979, when the Americans were taken hostage in the seizure of the American Embassy there. This was, therefore, a situation ripe for exploitation by the opposition groups, who were eager to sell themselves as guides to the unmapped region, as the ready-made solution to what was, in truth, an increasingly intractable and grave dilemma. And, like all pretenders to power, the groups maneuvered in a world of potentiality, dismissed as charlatans by some, viewed as possible American surrogates by others. What the Iranians had to fortify themselves, however, was the example of Chalabi—if he had found favor, why couldn't they?

The exiles' prospects seemed—at least to them—especially tantalizing in the early days of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, when it looked as if Iran might well be next. ("And it would have been, if Iraq had been a slam dunk," Ahy says.) Indeed, some Administration supporters who were intent on bringing democracy to the broader Middle East through regime change argued that Iran, not Iraq, should be first. Among them was Michael Ledeen, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, who played a role in the Iran-Contra scandal by arranging meetings between his friend the Iranian arms dealer Manucher Ghorbanifar and the U.S. government. Ledeen has been predicting for many years that Iran is on the verge of a popular revolution, which only requires some outside help to become a reality. He told a group of Iranian expatriates in Los Angeles not long ago, "I have contacts in Iran, fighting the regime. They need funds. Give me twenty million, and you'll have your revolution." He told me that in 2001 and 2002, when he pressed the case for Iran with friends in the Administration, he had support from some officials in the Pentagon and in the office of Vice-President Dick Cheney. Richard Haass, who was the director of the State Department's Policy Planning staff from 2001 to 2003, and who is currently the president of the Council on Foreign Relations, told me, "A number of Israeli officials were much more concerned about Iran. They worried that we were focussing on Iraq rather than on Iran, though they were careful not to appear critical of the Bush Administration."

But the prevalent view among neoconservatives in the Administration, Ledeen said, was that "the road to Tehran lies through Baghdad." A person familiar with conversations among the Vice-President's national-security staff when Saddam's regime was toppled recalled, "There was a lot of loose talk there—like 'Now we can deal with Iran.'" Democratization in both Afghanistan and Iraq, it was believed, would increase the pressure on the Iranian regime. And, if the threat of military intervention was required, U.S. forces would be well situated. James Dobbins, the Bush Administration's special envoy for Afghanistan, told me that in the prewar planning for Iraq "there was an intention that the U.S. would retain troops in Iraq—not for Iraq stabilization, because that was thought not to be needed, but for coercive diplomacy in the region. Meaning Iran and Syria."

Those who were keen on the Chalabi model—that is, an exile who could supposedly organize and unify the opposition—were looking at Iran through that prism, too. Conservative think tanks like the American Enterprise Institute and the Washington Institute on Near East Policy "have been looking for a Chalabi," according to Gary Sick, who was the principal White House aide for Iran during the Iranian revolution and is now a professor at Columbia University. Sick listed prospective Chalabis who have visited one or both of the institutions over the past several years: Reza Pahlavi; Hussein Khomeini, the grandson of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini; and Mohsen Sazegara, one of the founders of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps. Sazegara leaped briefly to the forefront of the referendum movement in the fall of 2004, in London. Patrick Clawson, a prominent Washington hard-liner, brought him to the Washington Institute, where he is the research director. The institute is well connected within the Administration and has close ties to the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee, or AIPAC, and Sazegara has been criticized by others in the opposition for his association with it. "Patrick and the Washington Institute have been running screen tests," Sick continued. "'What do you think of this guy, wouldn't he be good?' They take them to the Council on Foreign Relations to speak, and get their papers published. But, so far, nobody has passed the test."

Many who have known Pahlavi over the years were surprised that, for a time, he seemed to come close to passing it. Although Reza was crowned king in Cairo, following his father's death, in 1980, and his mother, Farah Pahlavi, who lives in Washington and Paris, refers to him in formal settings as "Your Majesty," he did not seem like a man who would risk everything to regain his throne. Vali Nasr, an Iranian-born political-science professor at the Naval Postgraduate School, whose father was counsellor to Queen Farah, said, "I knew him when we were young. He's very nice—but he is not perceived by Iranians to be regal. And he wants to be *brought* back." In 1986, when Pahlavi was twenty-five, he married another Iranian expatriate, seventeen-year-old Yasmine Etemad-Amini, whose parents had fled to the U.S. at the time of the revolution. Reza and Yasmine lived in a Washington suburb with their three daughters. Pahlavi had C.I.A. funding for a number of years in the eighties, but it ended after the Iran-Contra scandal. An Iranian-American who knows him well told me a story that had made the rounds in Iranian expatriate circles: "Reza was shopping in Nordstrom's, buying plates. A Persian woman came up to him, and said, in Persian, 'I should shatter these plates over your head! Why are you here, shopping, when you should be saving our country?'"

"Our dream is to live long enough to see the end of our renovation."

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The student riots in Tehran in the summer of 1999 were momentous for Iran. President Khatami's liberalizing rhetoric in the previous few years had created an atmosphere in which the press and pro-democracy activists felt somewhat unbound; the press was freer than at any other time in the history of the Islamic Republic, and banned political parties began to regroup. In the fall of 1998, however, two pro-democracy dissidents and three writers were murdered by agents of the regime. The public outcry was so sharp that regime officials condemned the murders, and a cabinet minister was replaced; but after a bill limiting press freedoms was provisionally passed by the parliament, and a leading reformist newspaper was shut down by the judiciary, students at Tehran University protested, with chants for "democracy," "civil society," and "the rule of law." The government's paramilitary groups attacked them, and the carnage triggered riots throughout Tehran and in many other cities. The turmoil was the first serious challenge to the clerics, and might well have signalled the start of another revolution. Instead, President Khatami bowed to Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, and denounced the protesters. More than a thousand were imprisoned. "Eastern Europe was the model that influenced U.S. perceptions of Iran, and in the 1999-2003 period there was some intellectual legitimacy to that," an Iran specialist said. "It looked as though the opposition would be able to unite and find its voice—as though something might be possible. What were generally called reformers ran the gamut from moderate clergy to folks who wanted to reduce the authority of the Supreme Leader to

"Brodman, after giving it much thought, I've decided to let you go for no apparent reason."

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a figurehead, from people who were out-and-out secular to the banned but tolerated and the students. But they had no links of substance with the external opposition."

In the months after the riots, Pahlavi tried to rise to the role he had inherited. He had long been surrounded by a small clique of his father's loyalists. Ahmad Oveyssi, whose brother was the Shah's ruthless martial-law administrator, is Reza's closest confidant. Parviz Sabeti, who headed the division of SAVAK—the Shah's secret police—charged with repressing the opposition, is one of the most despised of the Shah's men alive today. Pahlavi now brought in Bagher Parham—a respected Iranian dissident who fought to overthrow his father—as a political adviser. He met with a group of wealthy Iranian-American Republicans in New York to ask them for money for his organization and, according to an Iranian-American knowledgeable about the meeting, was told that they would match dollar for dollar any funds that he put in. "But Reza told them, 'I have no money!'" It was a touchy point; many Iranian-Americans believe that the son of the Shah must have access to great wealth, but Pahlavi has always insisted that he does not. Fereydoun Hoveida, a prominent Iranian exile (his brother was the Shah's Prime Minister), told me that Pahlavi visited the emir of Kuwait, the emir of Bahrain, the king of Morocco, and the royal family of Saudi Arabia to ask for funds, and was successful. (Pahlavi claims that his funding has come exclusively from Iranian émigrés and dissidents in Iran.)

Pahlavi began to give speeches at college campuses and Washington think tanks. On February 14, 2001, he appeared at the Washington Institute. An Iran expert in the audience recalled, "He was polished. He seemed as if he would be a nice neighbor—but he was not a charismatic guy who was going to lead a revolution. It was Valentine's Day, and he began by saying, 'In case any of you are planning to take your wives or girlfriends out to dinner, I hope you have planned ahead and made reservations—I tried this morning, and it turns out I'm going to be cooking.' I remember thinking, This guy wants to overthrow the Islamic Republic and he can't get dinner reservations!"

A serendipitous event helped to raise Pahlavi's profile. In March, 2000, an Iranian-American named Zia Atabay, who had been a popular singer in the days of the Shah, started a Farsi satellite television station in Los Angeles—National Iranian Television, or NITV—that would broadcast to Iranians in the United States and Western Europe. Six months later, Atabay discovered that the NITV signal was being picked up in Iran. (A listener called in to a talk show, and announced to the startled host that he was calling from Isfahan.) After September 11th, Atabay asked the station's listeners in Iran to hold a candlelight vigil to show solidarity with the United States, and thousands in Tehran did so. In the fall of 2001, Pahlavi was repeatedly interviewed on NITV and other Farsi stations, and he spoke about nonviolent resistance, addressing, in particular, Iran's huge youth population. Many responded by demonstrating in the streets and chanting, "We love you America!"

"In those TV interviews, Reza was wearing a tie, and he was clean-shaven—people were so upset with the ruling clerics that this *mattered*," Afshin Molavi, a journalist who has reported extensively from Iran and is a fellow at the New America Foundation, told me. "He would speak about secular democracy, and people did embrace him." Molavi added that in Iran there was "an economic nostalgia for the Pahlavi era"—for a time when people enjoyed social freedoms, and could travel easily to Europe, and the currency was stronger. But they wanted to see some clear sign that Pahlavi would come and stand with them, lead them, and eventually their enthusiasm flagged.

Still, the response to Pahlavi's satellite-TV appearances allowed him to at least argue that he had a constituency in Iran. "And the C.I.A. got interested in him," an Iranian analyst told me. "It took the view that his uninvolvement could be an advantage. 'He's clean! He hasn't killed anyone! And he might be able to be a unifying figure.'"

Pahlavi and his supporters were thrilled by Bush's State of the Union speech in January, 2002, in which he referred to an "axis of evil" that included Iran and Iraq, along with North Korea, and later that year and in early 2003 opposition members obtained meetings with officials in the Vice-President's office, the National Security Council, and the State Department.

The heart of their support, however, was in the Pentagon, which was preparing a draft national-security Presidential directive, or N.S.P.D., on Iran. An Iranian political activist recalled having policy discussions with several people who were working on the draft, including Larry Franklin, the Pentagon's Iran desk officer; Ladan Archin, an Iranian-American Pentagon official; and Michael Rubin, a young Pentagon staff assistant who wrote the draft. (In August, 2004, it was reported that Franklin was suspected of having described the document's contents to two AIPAC employees; he pleaded guilty last October.) It appeared that the Defense Department officials had been in contact with Pahlavi's associates. "There were ideas discussed that I had heard about from Ahmad Oveyssi a year or so earlier," the Iranian activist said. When the activist offered his own ideas, the officials' obvious enthusiasm led him to conclude that the draft was an elaborate directive for the mobilization of opposition forces. There would be money for communication devices for students in Iran; for American and European N.G.O.s; for buying off and neutralizing the Revolutionary Guard; for buying information; for supporting existing satellite-television operations; and for funding the exile opposition.

In the spring of 2003, after the invasion of Iraq, Pahlavi and his close circle were heartened. "They became so cocky—they thought that any day now they were going back to Iran," a person with close ties to them told me. "It looked as though America had walked over Afghanistan and Saddam. The Americans were talking about bringing Zahir Shah, the former king, back to Afghanistan from Rome. When he fell from power, in 1973, he was sustained by the Shah. They figured the Americans were going to bring Reza back." One of Pahlavi's congressional allies, Senator Sam Brownback, a Republican from Kansas, introduced a bill that would have channelled a hundred million dollars to support opposition activities, including TV and radio broadcasts into Iran. In May, 2003, Michael Ledeen wrote a policy brief for the American Enterprise Institute Web site arguing that Pahlavi would make a suitable leader for a transitional government, describing him as "widely admired inside Iran, despite his refreshing lack of avidity for power or wealth."

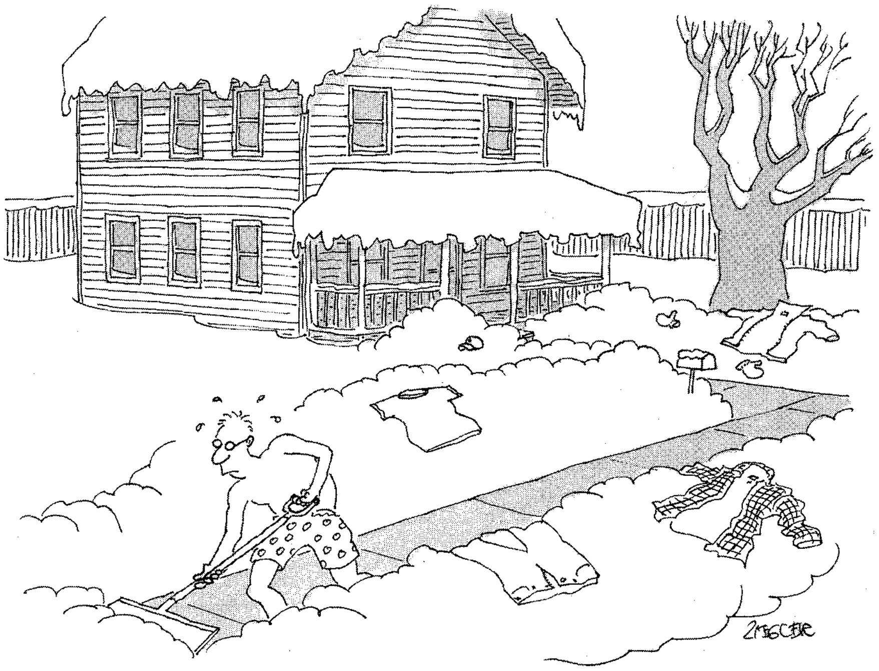
The schism within the Administration between those who were favorably disposed toward Pahlavi and those who were not reflected the broader interagency policy divide. Richard Haass, Secretary of State Colin Powell's policy-planning director, recalled recently, "Reza came to see me one day. It was a pleasant forty-minute meeting. It was not clear to me that he had much of a following in Iran—and, in any event, he did not convince me that Iran was on the brink."

Haass continued, "I was in one camp, and the Vice-President's office and the O.S.D."—the office of the Secretary of Defense—"in the other. There were two very different schools of thought. One, that the U.S. ought to 'engage' Iran, offer the Iranians as much of a dialogue as they were prepared to have—to extend these concrete and political benefits, but only if we get what we want. The problem is that a lot of people in the government have been wedded to the idea of 'regime change.' They thought the regime was vulnerable, and engagement would throw the Iranians a lifeline. I believed then and I believe now that they are dead wrong. History shows that the U.S. and Iran can do some business."

In late 2001, under the auspices of the United Nations, the two countries held talks regarding the American invasion of Afghanistan. In that situation, of course, the U.S. and Iran had a common interest, since the Shiite Iranians regarded the Sunni Taliban as their enemy. They provided considerable assistance during the invasion, allowing the U.S. to use an Iranian port and offering to search for American pilots who bailed out over Iranian territory. The Iranians were also vital to the success of the U.N. conference in Bonn in November, 2001, which created the interim government in Kabul. One Iranian official described his country's last-minute efforts to intervene with the Northern Alliance representatives, in order to salvage the agreement (an account that James Dobbins, the Administration's Afghanistan envoy, later confirmed to me). The Iranians seemed interested in expanding upon these talks and moving into other areas of coöperation. "And then," the Iranian official continued, "we got the 'axis of evil'!"

Former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, a supporter of engagement with Iran, told me, "It's not unknown here that the Vice-President's office and the Department of Defense were very close, joined at the hip, and that the rest of us, at the Department of State and, to a lesser extent, the C.I.A., were kind of inconvenient."

The argument between the proponents of regime change—who generally preferred to bring down the government by supporting Iranian opposition groups rather than by military invasion—and those of constructive engagement was played out in its most focussed form in the contest over the national-security Presidential directive, in the spring and summer of 2003. The Pentagon draft of the directive exemplified the hard-line approach, whereas State Department and National Security Council drafts left room for diplomatic engagement. The key question, one person familiar with



the debate explained, was whether the divide in Iran was between the reformers (Khatami) and the hard-liners (Khamenei), which argued for a policy of engagement; or between the people and the entire theocratic system, which argued for regime change. "From the Pentagon and the Vice-President's office, there was violent resistance to any suggestion that we should engage the Iranians," another person knowledgeable about the debate told me. He also recalled that President Bush was always skeptical of the reformers.

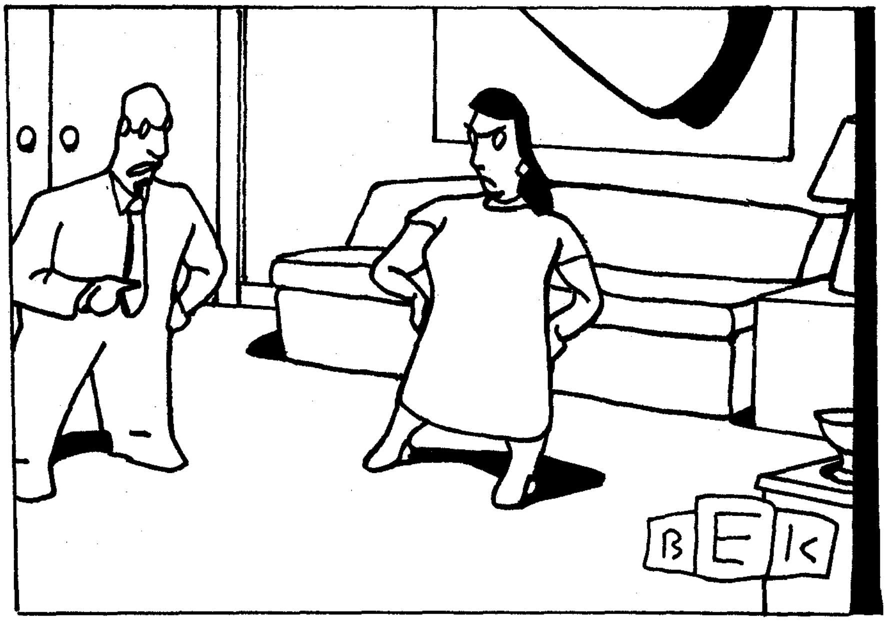
A senior Administration official described the anti-engagement view: "Our analysis was that the divide was between the people and the whole regime. Also, these people are ideologically hostile to us, and they're not going to be charmed out of their convictions, so engagement is a hopeless option. We wanted a muscular policy of opposition." Although no formal N.S.P.D. was issued, the official said, "The President came out closer to our side. It was resolved by the President's statements, which essentially took away the engagement option. So a lot of the issue was resolved."

But the victory was less resounding than the Pentagon was accustomed to in the first Bush term, in large part because of the increasing chaos in Iraq. By the late summer of 2003, it had become clear that, while there was not to be engagement, there would not be regime change, either—at least, not in the near term. "The enthusiasm for the Iranian opposition people subsided," Pooya Dayanim, an opposition activist who is the director of foreign affairs for the Iran Referendum Movement, recalled. "What the Administration found was that there was not a rallying figure it could support. Reza was too alienating to some factions. So the idea was, forget about a name—get a *movement.* A pro-democracy movement. That became the referendum."

In the spring of 2003, another Iranian opposition group, the Mujahideen-e Khalq (People's Mujahideen), or M.E.K., was also trying to exploit the opportunity created by the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. Its situation was more complicated, as its forces were based in Iraq and Saddam had been its financial backer and protector, but this was not the first time that the M.E.K. had turned adversity to its advantage. Founded in the mid-nineteen-sixties by middle-class students at Tehran University opposed to the Shah, it has shifted from an eclectic mixture of Islamism and Marxism to anti-imperialism, and, finally, to its latest incarnation, which espouses democracy, freedom, and women's rights. Like the monarchists, the M.E.K.'s leaders claim that they will bring a pluralistic democracy to Iran that will be friendly to the West.

Just before the Shah was deposed, Massoud Rajavi, who as a political-science student at Tehran University had been part of the group's governing committee, was freed from prison and assumed its leadership. Although at first Rajavi seemed a potential Khomeini ally, by 1980 he and the Ayatollah were enemies. (M.E.K. members were prevented, through electoral fraud, from winning seats in the parliament, and Khomeini banned Rajavi from appearing on the ballot as a Presidential candidate.) In an effort to launch another revolution, Rajavi mobilized the M.E.K. against the regime. In mass demonstrations in June, 1981, scores of people were killed or arrested and later executed. Rajavi escaped to Paris. The regime continued to target the M.E.K., carrying out hundreds of executions a month, and, with Rajavi calling for "revolutionary justice," the M.E.K., in turn, assassinated hundreds of regime officials, clerics, and judges, often through suicide bomb attacks.

In Paris, Rajavi formed the National Council of Resistance of Iran, which initially was a genuine "council," including other opposition groups in addition to the M.E.K., but the other groups subsequently dropped out. Rajavi's style of leadership was autocratic from the start, but by the mid-eighties the signs of a personality cult were unmistakable. According to Ervand Abrahamian, in his authoritative book, "The Iranian Mojahedin," M.E.K. members, especially in Western Europe, lived in communes, and each member had a supervisor, to whom he or she had to recount, hour by hour, the day's activities, which ended with a prayer and the chant "Greetings to Rajavi." Members had to surrender all their financial assets. Reading non-M.E.K. newspapers was prohibited, and self-criticism was obligatory. Those who wanted to marry had to obtain permission from the organization, which often provided a spouse as well. "In short, the Mojahedin had metamorphized from a mass movement into an inward-looking sect in many ways similar to religious cults found the world over," Abrahamian wrote. This transition was epitomized by Rajavi's involvement, in 1985, with Maryam Azodanlu. Maryam was already married, to Mehdi Abrishamchi, one of Rajavi's close associates. Rajavi overcame that fact by making the romance a matter of revolutionary necessity. First, he said that he was making Maryam his co-leader—and that it would transform thinking about the role of women throughout the Muslim world. Then, about a month later, it was announced



"You symbolize everything that's wrong with me."

that Maryam was divorced from Abrishamchi and that the two co-leaders would marry, in order to further the "ideological revolution." The announcement implicitly compared the marriage to one of the Prophet Muhammad's.

In 1986, the French government, eager to improve Franco-Iranian relations, yielded to demands from the Islamic Republic and expelled Rajavi and many of his followers. Rajavi went to Iraq, where he created the National Liberation Army of Iran, with about seven thousand M.E.K. troops. The M.E.K. established communes, training camps, clinics, schools, and prisons. In the ongoing Iran-Iraq war, the M.E.K. provided Saddam with intelligence on specific targets in Iran, and received arms, funds, and protection. (For this collaboration, above all, the M.E.K. is despised in Iran; several hundred thousand Iranians died in the war. "It is one of the issues where the Islamic regime and the people agree," Afshin Molavi, the Iranian journalist, said. "Language is really important in Iran. For the U.S., the government says 'Global Arrogance' "—the term has largely supplanted the familiar "Great Satan"—"but the people say 'Americans.' The government refers to the M.E.K. as *monafeqin*, which means hypocrite; it's a very loaded term, meaning almost a kind of blasphemy. And the people, too, casually say, 'Those *monafeqin*.' ")

In Iraq, M.E.K. fighters (many of them women) lived in military camps where vows of celibacy were mandatory, dissent suppressed, and any contact with outsiders strictly monitored. According to former M.E.K. members, some of their comrades who decided that they wanted to leave the M.E.K. camps were imprisoned or killed. The system of indoctrination, however, appears quite effective. When, in June, 2003, Maryam was arrested and imprisoned in France, several of her followers in Europe immolated themselves. Today, images of Maryam and Massoud Rajavi gaze out from walls in M.E.K. offices and barracks in Iraq, and adorn placards and T-shirts at M.E.K. demonstrations (as, for example, at the United Nations last September, where M.E.K. members protested against President Ahmadinejad, who was addressing the General Assembly).

As the best-funded and best-organized Iranian opposition group, the M.E.K. has a highly sophisticated and successful propaganda machine. Ali Safavi, a deft, smooth-talking Iranian émigré, acts as a spokesman for the N.C.R.I., the M.E.K.'s political wing. "For years, the Saudi lobbying machine in Washington was put to use by the M.E.K.," Vali Nasr, the Naval Postgraduate School professor, told me. "Reza Pahlavi and other exiles were envious of the contacts Ali Safavi had." Despite the fact that the M.E.K. has been on the list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations since 1997, the group has many supporters in Congress, including Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Florida Republican, who noted in April, 2003, that "this group loves the United States. They're assisting us in the war on terrorism—they're pro-U.S."

In the weeks before and after the invasion of Iraq, American and Iranian officials held talks; as with the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan, there were common interests. The Americans were planning to remove Saddam Hussein, and to establish a democratic Iraq in which the long-oppressed Shiite majority would gain greater political power. The Iranians, as Shiites, heartily approved both measures. A Shiite-dominated government in Iraq would at least be friendly, if not an Iranian proxy. Iran, therefore, not only would not cause trouble for the U.S. invasion but would offer assistance in the early reconstruction period. In the course of the talks, however, the Iranians asked for assurances that U.S. forces would treat the M.E.K. members, most of whom were in a facility called Camp Ashraf, near Iraq's border with Iran, as a hostile, Saddam-backed force. An Iranian official told me that ultimately such assurance was given.

A military officer who was monitoring intelligence and communications from American troops as they approached Camp Ashraf, where some four or five thousand M.E.K. fighters were living, told me, "They were clearly a target. We viewed them as a possible ally of Saddam. But, once our folks rolled up on the camp, it was 'Wait a minute, we're going to hold up and talk.' " A ceasefire was negotiated.

In the Bush Administration, the usual factional conflict now erupted over the question of what should be done with the M.E.K. At the State Department, Richard Armitage said, "Some of us were arguing that they should be disarmed—they're a terrorist organization. And the Pentagon was arguing, Maybe we can use them in Iran. And Dr. Rice"—Condoleezza Rice, then the national-security adviser—"I heard her say one time, 'Look, a terrorist group is a terrorist group.' "

In the end, the M.E.K. fighters were largely disarmed, and were restricted to Camp Ashraf, under U.S. control; then, suddenly, they became a bargaining chip. On May 12, 2003, three truck bombs were detonated in Western housing complexes in Saudi Arabia, killing twenty people, seven of them Americans. According to U.S. intelligence, Al Qaeda figures connected to that bombing were in Iran, and U.S. officials demanded that the Iranians turn them over. The Iranians responded that they would do so, but only in exchange for the M.E.K.—terrorists for terrorists. The Administration said no.

"If the Administration had gone ahead, it would have laid the basis for discussing other parts of a grand bargain," Martin Indyk, a top Middle East negotiator in the Clinton Administration, said. In the spring of 2003, no longer in the government, he spoke with Iran's Ambassador to the United Nations, Mohammad Javad Zarif. "After the toppling of Saddam, the swiftness of that victory and the presence of U.S. forces on all of Iran's borders got the attention of the hard-liners. They sent signals to the Bush Administration that they might be ready for a grand bargain."

"That's nonsense," an Iranian official said. "The discussions were initiated by the United States. The idea did not originate in Tehran." The official said that the regime received a proposal through an intermediary who said that it had originated on the seventh floor of the State Department. He said that the gist of the proposal was that Iran and the United States should agree to start negotiating with mutual respect, and that each side would address the other's concerns. The official wouldn't specify details, because he still hoped that the proposal could serve as the basis for future talks.

According to Indyk, who was one of a number of conduits between the two countries during this period, "Zarif said that everything would be on the table: their nuclear program; their sponsorship of terrorism—he was quite open about it. He said they would drop support for the Palestinian terrorist organizations. But they had certain requirements, regarding their role in Iraq and in the Gulf. They wanted us to concede their dominance in the Gulf. We'd essentially be partners. And what kind of security guarantees could we provide?"

The Iranian official said that the regime responded with a counterproposal, which had only minor modifications. "And that was the end of the story. It was April, May, 2003. There was no reaction."

(A former U.S. government official who had read the proposal speculated that the confusion about its provenance may have originated with the intermediaries.)

If the Administration's engagement faction had had its moment, it was short-lived, and the proponents of regime change clearly carried the day. The proposal was dropped. "Once that was off the table, the Iranians went into a different kind of calculation," Indyk said. "As we became bogged down in Iraq, we were much less of a threat, and we needed *them* not to play a destabilizing role." Indyk ticked off examples of U.S. actions that had benefitted Iran: beating back the Taliban, overthrowing Saddam, empowering the Iraqi Shiites, and pushing the Syrian Army out of Lebanon, which left a vacuum that the Iranian-backed Hezbollah was able to fill. "The Iranians are markedly strengthened. It's a perfect storm! And all by our own actions." Indeed, the Iranian official remarked to me recently, "Since the revolution, we've never felt stronger in the region."

The M.E.K., demonstrating its long-honed talent, was wresting opportunity from this latest misfortune. Having lost its Iraqi patron, narrowly escaped annihilation by U.S. forces, and come close to being delivered into the hands of its bitterest enemy, it was promoting its candidacy as an agent of regime change. In Camp Ashraf, M.E.K. fighters being interviewed by American intelligence officials struck consistent themes, according to a former U.S. military officer. First, they should be taken off the F.T.O. list. Their forces could then assist the Coalition Provisional Authority, patrolling the border between Iraq and Iran. And, more broadly, this former officer continued, "they saw themselves as the equivalent of the Iraqi National Congress, the Chalabi group that was used so heavily in prewar planning. They wanted to be like that, and part of the solution of a new Iran." A person close to the M.E.K. said that it offered to provide intelligence, both on Iran and on Iranian activity in Iraq.

In fact, the highlight of the M.E.K. résumé is its role as an intelligence source. Over the years, it has made periodic claims about Iran's nuclear programs. The claims have always elicited skepticism from the International Atomic Energy Agency, the organization that monitors nuclear proliferation. In August, 2002, the M.E.K.'s political wing, the N.C.R.I., announced at a news conference in Washington that its sources had discovered that two secret sites were being built, south of Tehran, to provide fissile material for nuclear weapons. One, it said, was a plant that would be used for nuclear-fuel production, in the desert town of Natanz, and the other was a heavy-water production plant, for the extraction of plutonium, in Arak. This time, the I.A.E.A. was able to confirm the allegations, and in early 2003 the M.E.K. attained a level of credibility it had never had before.

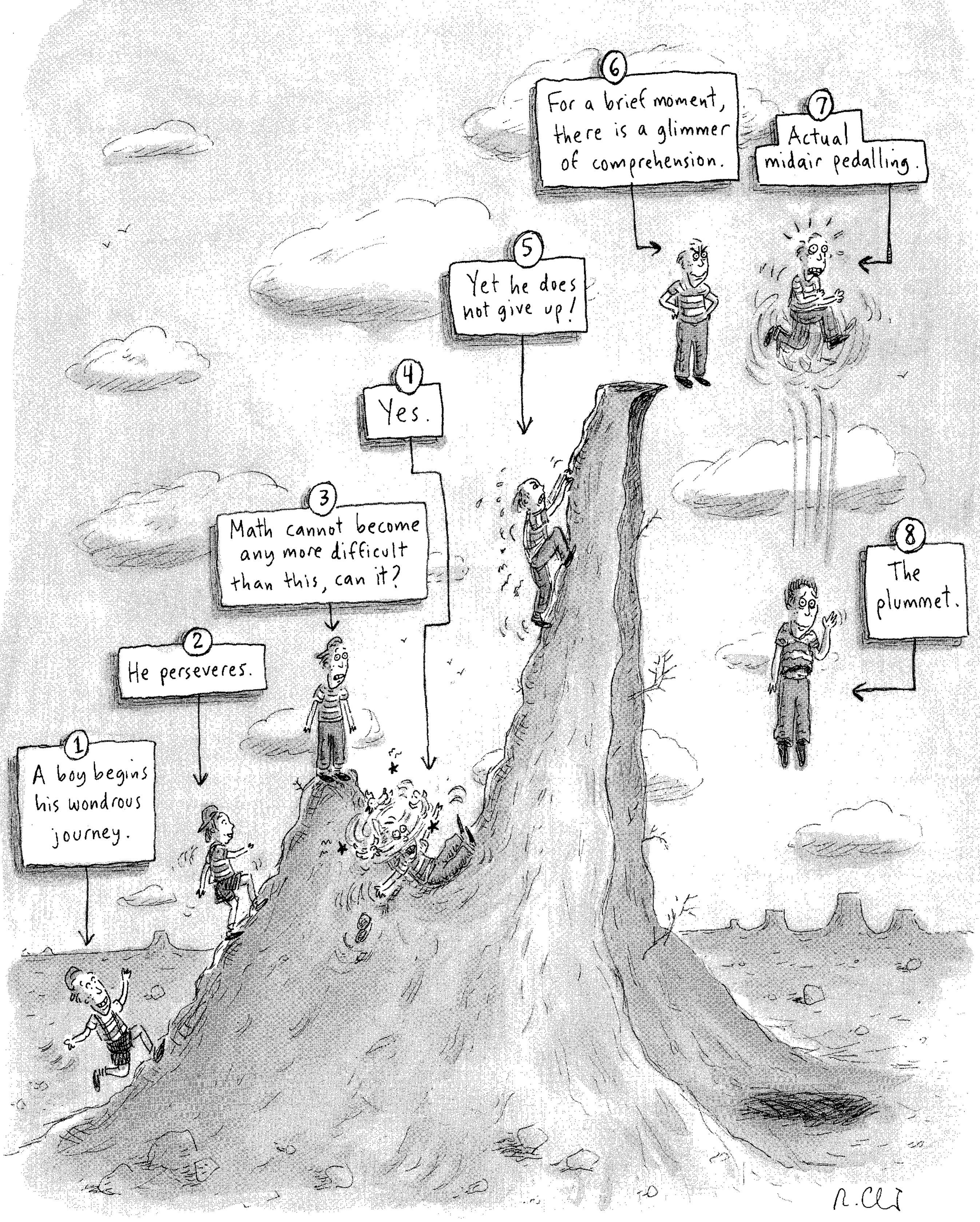
An Iranian-American political activist told me, however, that the N.C.R.I.'s intelligence had actually come from Israel. This person said that Israel had earlier offered it to a monarchist group, but that that group's leaders had decided that "outing" the regime's nuclear program would be viewed negatively by Iranians, so they declined the offer. Shahriar Ahy, Reza Pahlavi's adviser, confirmed that account—up to a point. "That information came not from the M.E.K. but from a friendly government, and it had come to more than one opposition group, not only the mujahideen," he said. When I asked him if the "friendly government" was Israel, he smiled. "The friendly government did not want to be the source of it, publicly. If the friendly government gives it to the U.S. publicly, then it would be received differently. Better to come from an opposition group." Israel is said to have had a relationship with the M.E.K. at least since the late nineties, and to have supplied a satellite signal for N.C.R.I. broadcasts from Paris into Iran. When I asked an Israeli diplomat about Israel's relationship with the M.E.K., he said, "The M.E.K. is useful," but declined to elaborate.

While the M.E.K. fighters in Camp Ashraf were making their case to American intelligence officers, the N.C.R.I. was working its levers in Washington. In 2003, an associate from the powerful Republican lobbying group of Barbour Griffith & Rogers invited Neil Livingstone, the C.E.O. of Global Options, an international risk-management firm, and Gregory Minjack, who was an executive at Public Strategies, a Washington-based crisis-management company, to explore the possibility of getting the M.E.K. off the F.T.O. list, and to promote its usefulness. Even though the N.C.R.I. was allowed to operate in the United States, the job would have to be handled carefully, because receiving funds from an organization on the F.T.O. list is prohibited. Payment was supposed to come from U.S.-based Iranian expatriates.

For several weeks, the three companies worked on a pitch, sending representatives to meet with different expatriate Iranians who might serve as fund-raisers for the effort. Livingstone told me that he has known some M.E.K. fighters for decades. "There are a few cultlike aspects to them," he said, but added, "I like them, because they bug Iran." Minjack, who did a good deal of the legwork, learned that the M.E.K. was eager to serve as a proxy for the Bush Administration. "The M.E.K. people were saying, 'Let us be your surrogates, the lead troops—and then the disaffected will rise up,' " he said. "It was to be a Bay of Pigs kind of thing."

The M.E.K. also wanted to be the government-in-waiting, Minjack recalled, so he asked whether the organization had any documentation to show its democratic bona fides. A constitution? Statutory documents? Members gave him "a big stack of stuff," which he asked an analyst at the Hoover Institution to examine. "I wanted to see whether Hoover would give them a seal of approval—saying, if something happens, this group has the intellectual basis to fill the vacuum." The analyst declined to become involved. All this maneuvering came to an abrupt halt on August 15, 2003, when the Trea-

FALLING OFF THE MATH CLIFF


① A boy begins his wondrous journey.
② He perseveres.
③ Math cannot become any more difficult than this, can it?
④ Yes.
⑤ Yet he does not give up!
⑥ For a brief moment, there is a glimmer of comprehension.
⑦ Actual midair pedalling.
⑧ The plummet.

sury Department shut down the N.C.R.I. office in Washington; the State Department had argued that the office was functioning as part of the M.E.K.

As the Bush Administration became wholly absorbed by Iraq, the M.E.K concentrated on making itself useful to the U.S. there. In the past eighteen months, it has provided a steady stream of intelligence on what it claims are Iran's activities in Iraq, and its Washington advocates continued to lobby on its behalf. Last summer, Raymond Tanter, a former National Security Council staff member and a visiting professor at Georgetown University, told me that he considered the M.E.K. the only opposition group capable of overthrowing the regime. He added that he had spent six hours with Maryam Rajavi in Paris, and found her to be a "*very* impressive woman." (Massoud Rajavi's whereabouts have been a mystery since the U.S. invasion of Iraq.) Tanter predicted that the M.E.K. would be removed from the terrorist list and used by the U.S. against the regime. "I foresee a situation where Laura Bush, Condi Rice, Karen Hughes, and Maryam Rajavi are posing for a picture in the White House," Tanter said.

Early last year, at Stanford University, the three co-directors of the Hoover Institution's Iran Democracy Project—Abbas Milani, Michael McFaul, and Larry Diamond—were collaborating on an article that they hoped would influence U.S. policy toward Iran. Their perspectives were different from those of other polemicists. Only one, Milani, was an Iran expert; McFaul and Diamond were experts in the field of democratic development. McFaul had specialized in the former Soviet Union, and Diamond had recently served as an adviser to the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq.

It seemed a propitious moment. President Bush, in his second inaugural address, had made democratization the keystone of his foreign policy, asserting that the U.S. would support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, "with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world." Also, with the departure of Secretary of State Colin Powell and Deputy Secretary Armitage, the polarization on Iran within the top tier of the Bush Administration had seemingly ended.

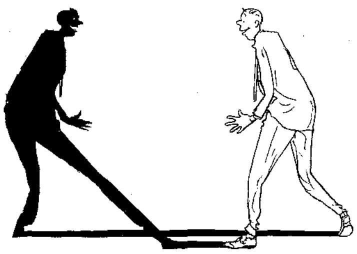
SOMETHING I'VE MEANT TO WRITE ABOUT FOR 30 YEARS

The Florida East Coast Railroad: dawn

One felt dirty, dirty, with swollen feet
and twisted clothes twisted under one
the scratchy sooty plush
the reek of beer and rye; a sailor's hat
hung on a seat arm. All the sailors were
passed out or sleeping & the soldiers, too—
in a mad ugly mess open mouths
and baby faces, flushed

We stopped for just a moment, a small town
in southern Georgia? probably—
we jerked, backward and forward there
and I woke up—
Looking right into nigger town
then back, then the same place again,
as if to make sure I'd really seen it
I'd really see it, and I did—
The light was lavender. The unpainted houses
were almost the color of the air
air color, almost—sodden (this *was* the South)

The Hoover article, "Beyond Incrementalism: A New Strategy for Dealing with Iran," argues that American policy toward Iran has been "stuck" since 1979, and that the urgency of the nuclear crisis calls for strong diplomatic initiatives. The article attracted attention, possibly because, in addition to its boldness, it had something for everyone. It advocated regime change by means of engagement. The more contact that existed between the two countries, the authors argued, the more the mullahs would be weakened. It urged the U.S. to negotiate directly with Iran on its nuclear program. If negotiations were successful, the U.S. should state that it had no intention of invading Iran or choosing its ruler, while continuing to emphasize its support for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Existing U.S. sanctions—a broad embargo that hurts the general population— should be lifted, and replaced by "smart sanctions," to target corrupt leaders. And diplomatic relations should be established—"not as a concession to the mullahs but as a step toward opening, liberalizing, and ultimately democratizing Iran."



It was, of course, an altogether different approach from the one espoused by the monarchists. The gulf between the two was illustrated even before the article was published, in May, 2004, when the Democracy Project sponsored a conference, and brought in a dozen political activists, journalists, and academics from Iran. Among them was Shirin Ebadi, the lawyer and human-rights activist, who won the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize, and who has urged the U.S. to reject military action and to support democratic change from within Iran. Her presence inflamed the Farsi media in Los Angeles, which has grown rapidly since that day in 2000 when Zia Atabay realized that his NITV station was reaching Iran. (Today, there are twenty television and five radio stations broadcasting in Farsi from L.A. to Iran, and virtually all air the views of their hawkish listeners.) "The L.A. media went crazy, attacking the conference for bringing Ebadi here," Abbas Milani re-

bare muddy yards, black trees   all its black people were in bed
one porch with a wisteria
as if the air had started to crystallize there
and melted again, dripped down—
But then it was a fence, a fence
that took my eye—I saw it slide back   silently
then forward like a slide several times
a picket fence
Where the wisteria was (the picket fence
once whitewashed)
someone had fixed
with nails, half hammered in, then bent,
a piece of broken mirror to each picket top
gothic shape—
these fragments
catching the light, reflecting, white
and bluish, sadly, over and over again
as we shunted
only the mirrors seeing the morning coming
20 or 30 of them—I lost count   20 or more
a crazy iconography decoration why not *decorate* morning?
Irregular jagged jagg'd disconnected mad

—*Elizabeth Bishop*

called. "They attacked her as an agent of the regime!"

Hamid Moghadam, a San Francisco businessman who is a co-founder of the Iran Democracy Project, is delighted that a distinctly different political voice has joined the cause. "I thought the groups that were talking to the Administration had an axe to grind," Moghadam said. "I think the problem in this Administration is that it doesn't know much about how things work in that part of the world, so it is misled by people who appear to know what they're doing. There's an absolute vacuum of ideas and thoughtful analysis. That's why we started this thing—and not just with Iranians." He meant McFaul and Diamond. "The only solution to all of this is democracy, but it cannot be dictated, Iraq style, or it will backfire. It can only be encouraged, through dialogue and open economic activity—it sheds light on all the creepy, crawly things. The youth are the key. Once they get used to economic activity and dialogue, they will expect it." More than two-thirds of Iran's population of seventy million is below the age of thirty-five.

"We hope to have some influence," Moghadam continued, referring to the Hoover project. "Condi, after all, is from the Farm." He meant Stanford. Indeed, what Abbas Milani refers to as Hoover's "conservative cachet" has provided considerable entrée in the Bush Administration.

After the Iranian elections, on June 25th, an intense debate ensued about what they meant. In an outcome that confounded American, European, and Israeli intelligence agents, not to mention Iranian political analysts, Ahmadinejad, a blacksmith's son, former militia member, and arch-conservative, had been elected President. Ahmadinejad, stressing his humble background and simple life style, had run a populist campaign that focussed on everyday economic issues, and promised to purge government corruption; the reform candidates had emphasized human rights, democracy, and social liberalization, but failed to address economic concerns.

On the eve of the election, President Bush had released a statement that was intended to bolster the call for an election boycott by some opposition groups. Referring to the fact that hundreds of candidates, including all the women candidates, were disqualified by the clerical Guardian Council, appointed by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Bush stated, "Iran's rulers denied more than a thousand people who put themselves forward as candidates, including popular reformers and women who have done so much for the cause of freedom and democracy in Iran." Bush's statement may have backfired. The Iranian regime replayed it repeatedly on national media; election observers from the International Crisis Group, a worldwide conflict-prevention organization, said that it motivated some Iranians to vote. The Crisis Group, which found that "by regional standards" the election "was competitive, had strong participation, and offered a broad choice," further concluded that "the current regime is not about to collapse, and any reform movement will need time to revive."

In early fall, Abbas Milani met privately with a number of officials at the State Department and the N.S.C. Milani sees himself as a pragmatist. ("Abbas represents purity of ideology—he's been persecuted by everybody!" Moghadam said.) Milani often remarks that he got to know leading officials in the Islamic Republic quite well when they were all political prisoners together, during the Shah's regime. (Milani was affiliated with a Maoist underground group, and, in 1976, he went to prison for a year. Later, he was purged from a university teaching job by the mullahs.) In contrast to some advocates of engagement, Milani has an antipathy for the regime so visceral that even hard-liners tend to hear him out. He repeatedly told U.S. officials, "The only solution is to get rid of these guys—but, counterintuitively, you have to soften the position." (He exhorted one senior official, "Do as Israel did! In 1980, there were signs all over Iran that said, 'Qom, 230 miles; Jerusalem, 2342 miles.' Yet Israel was helping Iran, sending arms.") Milani was advocating good-will gestures, such as the donation of earthquake-prediction centers, ending the embargo, exerting pressure on the regime for its violation of human rights, establishing diplomatic relations. "Talk to them—but with the purpose of overthrowing them," he urged.

The officials asked Milani what he thought was the best way to proceed on the nuclear track. He told them that he considers Iran's possession of nuclear weapons inevitable, and he is convinced that military strikes against the nuclear

"I'm putting you on a whatever-you-like-to-eat-don't diet."

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sites would rouse Iranians' nationalism and extend the life of the regime for many years. Moreover, he pointed out, allies of the regime—Hamas in Palestine, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt—have risen to new power through the spread of democracy in the Middle East, which had been championed by the Bush Administration. "If there is a military attack on Iran, it will play into the narrative of the West as the aggressor, and all of these radical Islamists will be strengthened." He also urged that the U.S. abandon the idea of anointing anyone as the future leader of Iran, pointing out that the Shah had never lived down the fact that he owed his throne to the C.I.A., which engineered a coup against Iran's nationalist Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, in 1953. "Why would you think anything has changed?"

When Ahmadinejad ventured to New York last September to address the General Assembly, he came as a diplomatic novice. But he was confident, and seemed to enjoy his international début, delivering a harsh, provocative speech, asserting three times that Iran would resume the enrichment of uranium. At a large dinner on the eve of his return to Tehran, his mood was buoyant. Referring to the demonstrators outside the New York hotel, he remarked, "I was told to expect tens of thousands—but I saw only about sixty. I was even ready to go speak with each of them!" A couple of months later, a video began circulating on the Internet in which Ahmadinejad, who is said to be deeply mystical, describes the experience of his U.N. speech to a leading cleric in Iran. "I felt that all of a sudden the atmosphere changed there, and for twenty-seven, twenty-eight minutes all the leaders did not blink," Ahmadinejad says. "They were astonished, as if a hand held them there and made them sit."

Until this year, the U.S. and Europe had been divided over Iran. In 2003, when France, Britain, and Germany—the so-called E.U.-3—decided to address the Iranian nuclear program by negotiation and engagement, the Bush Administration refused to support that move, and urged that Iran be referred to the Security Council for sanctions. The Europeans' engagement effort led Iran to suspend its uranium-enrichment program.

Then, in early 2005, the Administration, consumed by Iraq and with little energy to spare for another confrontation, agreed to endorse the E.U.-3 negotiations. It was not an unconditional endorsement. In a move engendered by Vice-President Dick Cheney's office, according to one participant in the negotiations, the U.S. demanded that the E.U.-3 ministers and the European Union foreign-policy chief, Javier Solana, sign a letter stating that, if the talks failed, they would support U.S. efforts to refer Iran to the Security Council. The U.S. also said that it would end its blocking of Iran's admission to the World Trade Organization, and would consider licensing the sale of spare parts for its aging civilian airliners. Taken together, these moves stirred hope in the engagement camp. Regime-change proponents were discomfited, but most concluded that the E.U.-3 talks would eventually fail, and the diplomatic effort would serve to legitimatize tougher action.

The true fusing of transatlantic solidarity began in August, two days after Ahmadinejad assumed office, when Iran rejected a package of European proposals and resumed uranium conversion. Iran's new chief nuclear negotiator, Ali Larijani, declared that the country would never halt uranium conversion. Iran has always insisted that under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty it has the right to make uranium fuel for civilian power reactors, and that that is its sole purpose; but two decades of deception, uncovered by inspectors, have shattered its credibility.

In September, the I.A.E.A. Board of Governors found Iran in noncompliance with a safeguard agreement that is part of the treaty, but the board was divided on the issue of sanctions; a vote to refer Iran to the Security Council was deferred. Then, at the beginning of the year, Iran went a step further. It removed I.A.E.A. seals from nuclear-enrichment-related equipment and material at the Natanz facility. Enrichment can entail feeding uranium gas through centrifuges. When it is purified and processed, reactor fuel is produced; a more extended process makes the fissionable core of a nuclear bomb.

On February 4th, the I.A.E.A.'s board voted to report Iran to the Security Council. In a coördinated effort, the U.S. and the E.U.-3 had lobbied each of the I.A.E.A.'s thirty-five board members in the weeks before the vote. Ahmadinejad responded to the vote in his signature fashion, calling Iran's enemies "idiots," and the vote "funny."

"We do not need you at all," he said.

"But you are in need of the Iranian nation. Issue as many resolutions like this as you want and make yourself happy."

The vote, however, was a rare display of diplomatic unity—twenty-seven to three, with five abstentions. R. Nicholas Burns, the State Department Under-Secretary for Political Affairs, noted, "The only countries that voted in favor of the Iranian position were Venezuela, Cuba, and Syria. Isn't that interesting?"

I asked Burns how much credit for the vote should go to Ahmadinejad.

"There's no question that his intemperate and objectionable statements rang the alarm bell in Europe," he said. "First, the statement that Israel should be wiped off the face of the earth—which was an extraordinary statement, in modern diplomacy. And, second, I think the Holocaust statement had an even deeper impact. The Iranians have been engaged in gratuitous Israel-bashing for twenty-five years, and there's no excuse for it, but people had heard this kind of thing before. But to have a modern leader come out and question the historical veracity of the Holocaust shocked the German public. So Ahmadinejad dug a hole for the Iranians, and he kept digging. And it got deeper and deeper as the autumn went on."

At the end of January, Burns said, "we were in London and Secretary Rice asked for a dinner with the Permanent Five foreign ministers" of the Security Council. "We had dinner at Jack Straw's house, and it was at that dinner that she persuaded the Russians and the Chinese to vote with us in the I.A.E.A." Russia and China, veto-wielding members of the Security Council, both have huge trade agreements with Iran, and both had steadfastly resisted earlier attempts to refer Iran to the Security Council. In the end, they agreed, on the condition that the referral not take place for at least thirty days, to give Iran time to negotiate a compromise. Russia has offered to carry out uranium-enrichment work on Iran's behalf, and then send the fuel to Iran for use at a nuclear power station.

What was not clear, in this dance of the West with Iran, was who was leading. When I spoke with an Iranian official last September, he laid out the options facing Iran: give up its right to a full nuclear fuel cycle; accept some demands of the Security Council, while rejecting others; or escalate. If Iran escalates, he said, "it creates a premature confrontation that the U.S. is not prepared to accept. We are in a stronger position now than we would be in five years' time under Security Council scrutiny. In this game of chicken, the chances of the other side getting out of the road are greater this way. As an analyst, I would say that escalation is more palatable than a prolonged, endemic crisis."

Among hard-line regime opponents, the new catchphrase is "Ahmadinejad is the gift that keeps on giving." In early January, Reza Pahlavi said on Fox News that you cannot negotiate with fascism, and the time has come to "support the Iranian people in their demand for regime change." The Committee on the Present Danger, a conservative Cold War-era pressure group that has been revived to address the threat of Islamist militantism, has called for regime change. Speaking at the Herzliya conference, an annual gathering in Israel of politicians and academics, Israel's Defense Minister, Shaul Mofaz, who was born in Iran, addressed the Iranian people: "Ahmadinejad, his hallucinatory statements, his criminal actions, and his extreme views will bring disaster upon you. Do what you understand needs to be done in order to prevent this." Senator John McCain has adopted a new mantra: "There is only one thing worse than military action. That is a nuclear-armed Iran." Reuel Marc Gerecht, a former C.I.A. employee now with the American Enterprise Institute, wrote in *The Weekly Standard* that the U.S. must decide whether it truly is "intolerable," as President Bush has said, for Iran to have nuclear weapons. "If so, then we will have to prepare to bomb."

Iran has dispersed and buried some of its nuclear facilities, and there are thought to be more than a hundred nuclear-related sites, devoted to a range of tasks; to attack them all, it is generally believed, would likely require many sorties and could result in extensive damage to Iranian civilians and cities. But in a recent op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*, Edward Luttwak, of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, disputed the idea that the military-strike approach is so daunting. To the contrary, he argued, the destruction of only "a few critical installations" would delay Iran's nuclear program for years, and "it could all be done in a single night."

"People say that Ahmadinejad is inexperienced, and some call him lunatic," an Israeli diplomat said recently. "I totally disagree with that. I think he is very calculated." He argued that Iran was threatening not only Israel but the U.S. and the moderate Arab regimes. "He is trying to rally the entire extremist Muslim world, to increase Iranian influence. It's a battle cry. You see Ahmadinejad's pictures today in the streets of Cairo, of Beirut. It is happening sooner than we thought, and it is

SAMUEL'S
Shanahan

"Turns out he had the body of a much younger man—in his fridge."

Victoria Roberts

"I've tried a lot of life strategies, and being completely self-serving works best for me."

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a sword over the entire Arab world." (The diplomat emphasized the urgency of the situation. Israeli intelligence asserts that Iran may be a year away from what it calls "the point of no return," or self-sufficiency, to acquire a nuclear bomb. U.S. intelligence sources estimate that Iran is between five and ten years away from actually having a nuclear weapon.)

Russia and China probably won't veto sanctions, the diplomat said. One likely scenario, he suggested, would be an I.A.E.A. inspections program—"airtight, intrusive, with cameras, twenty-four-hour presence of monitors, no ability to import nuclear technology." That would be supported by a resolution that invoked Chapter VII of the U.N. charter. "If Iran defies that, then it is defying the U.N., and under Chapter VII it can be forced to comply, militarily." This was the path the U.S. tried to follow, without success, before it invaded Iraq.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on February 15th, noted that "the weight of the Security Council, including the possibility of Chapter VII action," offered the West a new "menu of options." It was not entirely clear whether Rice was contemplating the Chapter VII provisions for economic sanctions or for military enforcement.

It is difficult to imagine the Europeans—let alone Russia and China—agreeing to a military attack. Despite all the talk of transatlantic comity, differences remain. For the E.U.-3, the referral of Iran to the Security Council clearly came as a kind of last resort. But for the Bush Administration the Security Council referral appears to have been the goal.

"We believe there is no good military option," Wolfgang Ischinger, Germany's Ambassador to the United States, said recently. If military strikes were launched, Iran's options for retaliation would be numerous: terrorist attacks, military activity in Iraq and Afghanistan, disruption of oil supplies. "At best, military strikes would only delay things, and at worst inflame the Middle East further and make it totally impossible to have a meaningful diplomatic effort," Ischinger went on. "This talk about military options is more likely to drive people into the arms of the mullahs."

Ischinger said that the U.S. should acknowledge that Iran has genuine security problems. Neighboring Pakistan, India, and Israel all are nuclear-armed. To persuade Iran that nuclear weapons aren't essential for its well-being, he suggested a regional security arrangement, like NATO, for the Middle East. "But the requirement is that the U.S. would have to start talking to the Iranians."

Bush Administration officials have, understandably, been very sensitive to the observation, over the past several years, that they have had no comprehensive policy on Iran—one of the most dangerous situations facing the world today. Now, a little over a year into President Bush's second term, they can finally argue that a two-track policy has emerged. On the nuclear track, the multilateralist diplomacy that (with Ahmadinejad's help) resulted in the I.A.E.A. vote may or may not lead to a positive outcome—particularly with recent mentions of Chapter VII enforcement—but the Administration has, in any event, achieved its longtime goal of bringing Iran to the Security Council. And, once that was secured, in tandem with the E.U.-3, the Administration was finally free to pursue a reconstituted policy of regime change, or, as it now says, democratization—the policy that high-level officials so fervently believe in.

In the past few months, there have been signs of this policy's gestation. In an address on Iran in late November, Under-Secretary Burns uttered a phrase that was seized upon by regime-change proponents: "Today . . . the issue is no longer the 'moderates' versus the 'hardliners' but the Iranian public's growing disaffection with the entire clerical system." And the President, in his State of the Union address, spoke over the heads of the government to the people, saying, "Let me speak directly to the citizens of Iran. . . . We respect your right to choose your own future and win your own freedom." Then—less than two weeks after the I.A.E.A. vote—Condoleezza Rice, in her appearance before the Foreign Relations Committee, announced that the State Department was asking Congress for supplemental funding to increase pressure on the Iranian regime by expanding radio and television broadcasting into Iran, and helping political dissidents. Everything about Rice's message, from its center-stage announcement and its press promotion to the size of the funding request—a stunning increase from $3.5 million last year to a total of $85 million—seemed intended to proclaim to the world that the policy had arrived.

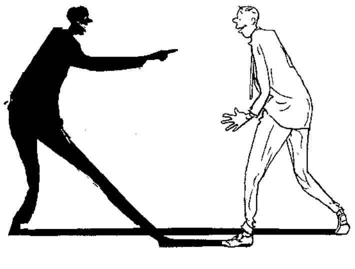
"People are arguing for a much broader approach, but we're in the narrow mode now, because the President wants to give the Europeans a shot," someone with knowledge of the policy told me, a couple of months ago. But, once the E.U.-3 track fails, he continued, "then you widen it, to support the Iranian people in their desire to be free of the regime. You reach into your toolkit, and there's a wide variety of things you can do. This is in keeping with the President's freedom agenda." He also said, "Condi completely agrees with it. She is of one mind with what Burns said," about the divide between the people and the regime.

It seemed odd, in a way, that the policy had emerged not in the Pentagon, where it was conceived, in 2003, but in the State Department, where it was opposed. It was, however, not the same State Department—Powell and Armitage were gone, and Rice and Burns inclined more toward the regime-change view. And the outlines of the $85-million program had been developed by Elizabeth Cheney, the Vice-President's daughter, who is the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs. She was assisted by two Near Eastern Affairs officials, J. Scott Carpenter and David Denehy, who had worked together in the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq, and were dedicated pro-democracy advocates. Referring to Denehy and Carpenter, Michael McFaul, who knows them both, said, "They have fought for years now to increase these budgets. From their point of view, they've won the argument at the strategic level. At the operational level, they don't really have a good idea about how it's going to work. That's true, generally. Democracy promotion is an art, not a science."

The largest chunk, fifty million dollars, is marked for increasing television and radio broadcasting in Farsi into Iran. The current plan is to try to do this by upgrading the existing Voice of America broadcast and Radio Farda, an American-sponsored station that mainly plays music. "For me, the model is Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty," McFaul said. "You would have Iranians in charge—with autonomy, getting money from the government but not part of Bush Administration propaganda. In places where we've been successful at supporting independent media—Serbia, Ukraine—there were fantastic media outlets that had real consequences for democratic change, and what is important to note is that those were indigenous outlets that sought external assistance when domestic sources were not available. That has to be the model. It can't be sitting down here on C Street, in the bowels of the Voice of America, putting on shows to talk about Bush foreign policy."

Rice's announcement had a pronounced déjà-vu effect. Just as in the spring of 2003, people were starting to line up for the anticipated millions. The M.E.K. advocate Raymond Tanter, in a congressional briefing, urged that the organization be removed from the Foreign Terrorist Organizations list and suggested that—with Rice's calling for increased funding to promote democracy in Iran—"this is the time" to do so. A government team made a trip to California. State Department officials were accompanied by Ladan Archin, from the Pentagon, whose presence underscored, to some, the resurgence of the regime-change proponents. The officials met with monarchists and owners of a couple of media outlets; the L.A. crowd was in a froth of excitement, over the mere notion that "the evil State Department," as one put it, had come to see them. According to an Iranian activist, Reza Pahlavi and Shahriar Ahy were probably going to receive funds for one of the things that had been on Pahlavi's Christmas wish list—communications devices for dissidents inside Iran. All this new ferment raised the question, far-fetched as it might seem, of whether Pahlavi could possibly come to play the Chalabi-like role that had been contemplated by some factions in the Administration in 2003.

The dearth of options and of knowledge about Iran—combined with the Bush Administration's renewed commitment to regime change—makes virtually anything seem possible. McFaul turned to his favorite analogy, the Soviet Union. "If you had an argument about what the role of Solzhenitsyn would be if he were to come back to Moscow, what that would mean for politics in Russia, you would have literally hundreds of people who would have an informed opinion about that. But when we talk about Pahlavi—what the implications of bolstering him would be—we're relying on about three people to answer that. I'm not an expert on Iran—I'm a very interested student. But I have a good feeling for the community of those who claim to be experts. I say, what's the map of civil society in Iran? How are you going to support civil society if you don't even know what it is there? And that I think is the real dilemma of Iran. So I think the possibility of error—not unlike the Chalabi story—is extremely high."



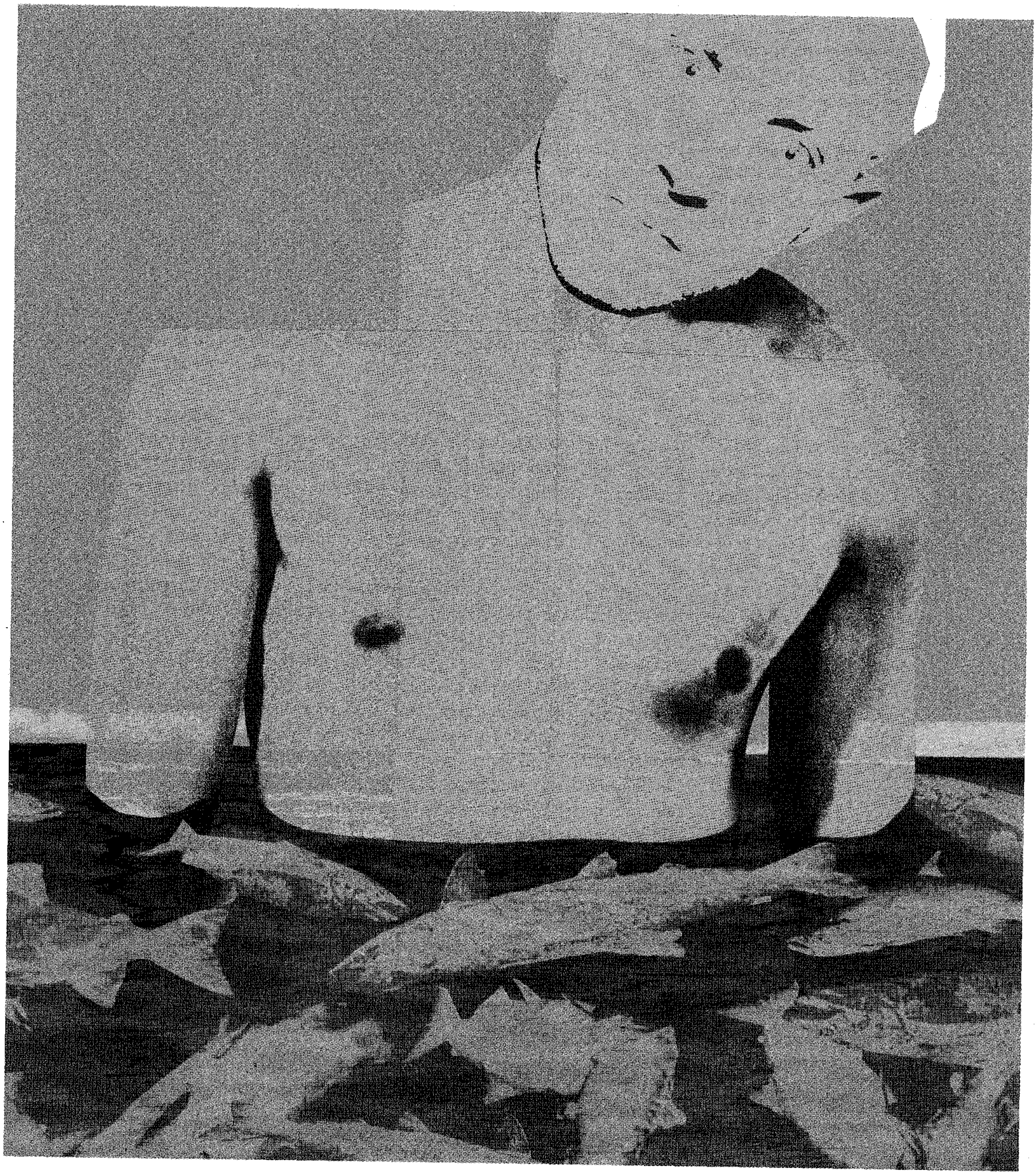
McFaul has given up arguing that the U.S. should establish diplomatic relations with Iran, now that Ahmadinejad is in charge; but he, like many Iran analysts, believes that the political situation in Iran is in flux. "There is a misperception here in Washington that there is a monolithic position vis-à-vis the West inside Iran, represented by Ahmadinejad. In fact, he is seen by a lot of the Old Guard as very dangerous, and the regime is very divided." McFaul remains convinced that, ultimately, the only way to make serious headway on both the nuclear and the regime-change tracks is through engagement.

When I asked Under-Secretary Burns whether, if the Iranians were to signal some readiness to compromise, he could envision the U.S. holding talks with Iran, he replied, "The Iranians have given no indication of a willingness to be receptive—none—since Ahmadinejad was elected. And, you know, Secretary Rice has been saying consistently that we are on a diplomatic track, and we are. But diplomacy has to be hard-edged. I don't mean warlike. I mean hard-edged. And so we think it's far more likely that Iran is going to respond to isolation, to sanctions, and to tough measures like that from the international community, rather than just jaw-jaw. So we believe we've entered a new phase of the diplomacy, where we have to take the Iranians to the Security Council, where we have to illuminate their transgressions, and countries have to begin to penalize them with sanctions, and other punitive measures, in order to tighten the pressure around them." ♦

FICTION

THE BONE GAME

BY CHARLES D'AMBROSIO



They'd only taken a simple wrong turn somewhere—taken a wrong exit off the freeway, then got caught downtown in the maze of Seattle's one-way streets—but to D'Angelo it was as if they'd travelled back in time to the nineteenth century. He looked out the Cadillac's tinted window and saw, through a haze of watery green, a few Chinese men in loose slacks, old coolie stock, it seemed to him, struggling up the steep hill, stooped over as if shouldering the weight of a maul. "Look at those Chinks," he said. "I bet they laid some track in their day." Kype finally found the street he wanted and steered the car north through Pioneer Square. An Indian sat on the curb with his head in his hands, tying back two slick wings of crow-black hair with a faded blue bandanna. A pair of broken-heeled cowboy boots lay in the gutter while he aired his bare feet. D'Angelo rolled down his window, waved a gun in the air, took a bead, and dry-fired. The hammer struck three times against empty chambers, but in his mind D'Angelo had dropped the Indian, right there on the sidewalk. He raised the barrel to his lips and blew away an imaginary wisp of smoke.

"What if that had been loaded?" Kype said.

D'Angelo grinned, and fired the gun at Kype's face. "It isn't, is it?"

"Jesus," Kype said, grabbing the gun. He tossed it in the back seat. "Cut the cowboy crap."

D'Angelo just smiled and watched a couple of Filipina hookers shuffle under the awning of an expedition outfitter and guide service. Behind them, in the display window, a stuffed grizzly bear reared up on its hind legs. Kype palmed the steering wheel into another sharp turn, the Caddy's tires squealing rubber on the warm asphalt. A container of ashes rocked in the seat next to him. D'Angelo picked up the decorative urn and unscrewed the lid. Caught in a gust of wind, a cloud of gray ash eddied through the car. Kype coughed and fanned the air as some of the powdery remains of his grandfather drifted under his nose and blew into the street. He ran his tongue over his lips, tasting ash.

"Damn man," Kype said, spitting.

"Ashes to ashes." D'Angelo screwed down the lid and gave the urn a shake. Something inside rattled. "Bones," he said. "Teeth."

Kype snatched the urn from D'Angelo and set it in the back seat with the gun. He wiped the sweat from his forehead. It was hot, and he hadn't bathed in more than a week.

"How old was he?" D'Angelo asked.

"Ninety-nine," Kype said.

"I hope I don't live that long."

"Grandpa lived a good life."

"Some of those old boys just spend the golden years fouling their drawers."

"Grandpa maintained his dignity," Kype said.

"I can't get into old people," D'Angelo said.

He took a quick pull of bourbon and eased back in his seat. D'Angelo was wearing a red Western shirt with pearlish plastic snaps and a turquoise bolo tie, an outfit he'd bought in a tack shop in Tonasket, near the Canadian border. He'd hoped the shirt and tie would give him a Western look, but he was chubby and short and he still wore the baggy pin-striped slacks and red high-top sneakers he'd left Brooklyn in, six months earlier. To Kype he looked like one of those midget clowns that rode Shetland ponies at rodeo intermissions. The two men had met a couple of days before, when Kype picked up D'Angelo, who'd been thumbing for a ride at a truck stop east of the mountains.

"He almost lived a century," Kype said, thinking of his grandfather. "Washington wasn't even a state when he was born."

"You live that long," D'Angelo said, "there just aren't many people left to bury you. That's why *you're* out here, driving around like the Buddha, looking for the spot."

Kype let the conversation die and navigated the old car along the waterfront. The Eldorado had belonged to his grandfather, a tall, lean, white-haired patriarch who had remained vigorous—still splitting and stacking his own cordwood, still waking at dawn to fish for kings and silvers off Camano Head—until one evening two weeks earlier when he'd said, "I'm awfully goddam tired," and then sat down on the davenport, shut his eyes, and died. Later that night, sharply missing the old man, Kype had looked through his grandfather's address book and seen something that resembled the score sheet of a high 200 bowler—all spares and strikes, thick black diagonal slashes and X's drawn through name after name, as one by one his friends had passed away.

The Eldorado was the last car let on the ferry. Kype and D'Angelo got out and stood up front, gripping the gate chains, the stiff wind whipping their faces.

"Maybe it's this way," Kype said. He gestured expansively, sweeping his hand west, the sky a wash of leached red as the sun began to set.

D'Angelo drew a dented Marine Band harmonica from his shirt pocket and tried desperately to turn "Home on the Range" into an upbeat blues number. It was the only song he knew, and it sounded awful. He played it incessantly, but Kype, in the two days he'd known D'Angelo, hadn't heard much improvement.

When the ferry's horn blasted, Kype tossed a penny into the sound, something he'd done for luck on every crossing since he was a kid.

D'Angelo said, "He couldn't have been much of a dad to you."

"You don't know," Kype said.

"You guys never played catch, I know that."

"Yes we did," Kype said.

"You got a fem throw," D'Angelo said. "You got sissy muscles. Nobody ever showed you, I can tell."

Kype futzed with the zipper of his thin yellow windbreaker, and said, "Throwing isn't everything."

"We'll find the spot."

The "spot" was the right place to cast loose the old man's ashes. Kype didn't know where it was exactly, not on any map at least, but he knew he'd recapture a certain feeling when he got there. He'd been travelling back and forth across the state for a week, retracing his grandfather's steps, visiting his birthplace, his old haunts, looking for that feeling. Now he was headed for the ocean.

The memorial service—a garish cross between the stilted air of a museum fund-raiser and the drunken sloppiness of a send-off—had seemed ludicrous to Kype, with everyone from old family friends to business cronies to reporters there to speculate about the life and

JOHN RITTER

times of Henry Kype Green. His grandfather's wealth came from sources deep in the history and raw materials of the region—trees and fish, mostly—and the old man had been something of a legend, a legend the local newspapers had been rehashing with abandon. The last of the pioneers, the papers had called him. True enough, during the Volstead days he'd run booze down Haro Strait, he'd been big in timber, in the fisheries, he'd served a stint or two in the state legislature. Of his generation, he was certainly the last.

Kype had sat beside his drunken mother in the front pew as the Reverend mounted the pulpit and announced that for a man as great as Henry Kype Green death was a simple passage, a great reward for service rendered: old Kype, having done so much to improve the earthly garden, had long ago earned a providential seat in Paradise. It seemed to Kype a measure of his grandfather's eminence in the community that the key passages for the sermon and eulogy were taken from the Book of Revelation—*the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending, the four and twenty of this, the seven of that, the angels, the trumpets!*—but then, too, the service had been noisy with senile rumblings, old men and women muttering to themselves, calling out like dreamers, and the whole affair had been a little dotty and obscure and ultimately incomprehensible.

Following the service there was a lavish spread: crustless Walla Walla sweet-onion sandwiches, poached sockeye salmon, Dungeness crab, Willapa Bay oysters shucked and bedded in a glacier of shaved ice, mountains of Red Delicious apples, all gifts from friends, delivered—half in homage, half in throwback to Roman taxation—from the various corners of the state. Kype gave several interviews, but he had the uneasy feeling that his words were being reshaped and slotted into a story that had already been written. "My grandfather started out," he told a reporter from the Seattle *Times*, "as a whistle punk in a donkey show." The woman asking him questions brightened at the prospect of an unseemly revelation about old Kype's obscure origins but grew disappointed, then bored, when she learned that whistle punks and donkey shows had nothing to do with sex. Others were interested in Kype himself, the grandson rumored to be the primary beneficiary named in the will. Kype had never known his father, who'd drowned in a boating accident—waterskiing drunk, he'd neglected to let go of the rope and had smashed into a dock—shortly before Kype was born. Kype had been raised in his grandfather's house in the Highlands. With the reading of the will, he'd be filthy rich. This made people want to gawk at him, to see the mechanics of money, or wealth, grinding away inside.

Kype had slipped out of the hall and walked next door to the church, where his grandfather's urn rested on a bench beside the altar. He tucked it under his arm like a football and quickly made his way out of the church, down the steps, to the corner where the old man's car was parked. His mother had planned to set the urn on a marble shelf in the family mausoleum, but Kype had other ideas, or thought he did, as he turned the key and started up the ancient Eldorado.

Kype and D'Angelo drove through the night. The big car's headlights bored a tunnel through the dense overhang of cedar and blue spruce, a tunnel that opened briefly before them in a shaft of white light and closed immediately behind them in a darkness tinged red by the tail-lights. It was the dry season near the end of August, and there hadn't been any rain in weeks. In a few of the gypo outfits—makeshift mills set back from the road—they could see wheels of blue sparks spin from the saws and smell fresh cut wood as the blades bit pulp. Every now and then they passed a crop of white crosses that marked the location of a deadly wreck. The Eldorado sailed along, its generous suspension floating so loosely over the bends and curves that Kype managed to give himself a touch of seasickness.

At a fork in the road, a young woman appeared, holding her thumb out. She was wearing tight white shorts, ankle-strap sandals, and a man's shirt with the tails knotted together high on her waist. She was leaning against a huge rock, an erratic scrawled with Day-Glo declarations of love.

"Slow down, slow down," D'Angelo said.

Kype eased the car onto the shoulder. The woman picked up a woven basket and hopped into the back seat. She didn't even ask where they were going. She seemed to know.

"Well," D'Angelo said, "I guess you're game for going wherever the hell we go, huh? Want a drink?"

"Sure," she said. She slugged from the bottle, then wiped her lips. A rhinestone clip in the shape of a horse sparkled in her hair. "If you're on this road, there's only one place to go. You got no choice. Nothing but reservation up ahead." She took another drink before passing the bottle back to D'Angelo. "And the ocean," she said. "There's a big ocean at the end of this road."

"You from around here?" Kype asked. He tried to catch a glimpse of her in the rearview mirror, but she had sprawled in the big back seat, out of sight.

"Yep," she said. "Name's Nell, Nella Ides."

"Well, Nella Ides," D'Angelo said, "this guy's grandpa died. He was very fucking old, a real big shot. You may have heard of him. Kype, his name was Kype. Just like this guy. Anyway, me and my friend Kype here, we're drinking the old man's bourbon, and we got his old gun, and we're going to catch the biggest, wildest fish in the ocean with his old fishing pole."

"Putting the fun back in funeral," Nell said.

"That's right," D'Angelo said. "And since you're from around here, and you know the lie of the land, you're invited."

"Suits me fine," Nell said. "I got a cousin might be interested, too. For your friend there."

"My grandfather knew Mungo Martin," Kype said, looking in the rearview mirror.

"Who's Mungo Martin?" Nell asked.

"Mungo Martin? Mungo Martin was a tyee, a chief—Satsop or Haida, Bella Coola, maybe Makah."

"He wasn't no Makah," Nell said.

"Some chief, anyway. I don't really know. Supposedly a great artist or something. He carved totem poles, if that's art. Grandfather met him negotiating a timber contract after the war."

"See what I was saying," D'Angelo said. "This guy's granddad, old Kype, he was a high-ass muckamuck. A very big deal who knew Mungo, another very big deal. It was a high old time in town when old Kype and old Mungo got together."

"I'd know if he was a Makah. That I'd know."

"How old are you, Nella Ides?"

"Old," she said.

Nell's skin was dark and smelled richly of sweat, smoke, and coconut oil. She had spent most of the day drinking beer in Port Angeles. A man she'd met in P. A. had dropped her off on his way out to Forks. Before that she'd blacked out, and before that she had gone to a pink motel with the man, where a suspicious night clerk had forced her to sign the registry. She'd used her Makah name, the long English translation that took up three spaces in the guest book: What-you-get-you-can't-store-up-because-it-is-so-much.

D'Angelo climbed into the back seat and sat beside her. "Your eyes are green," he said, kissing her.

"Get us that bottle back here," Nell said.

Kype handed the bottle over, feeling jilted, suddenly the chauffeur for his hitching passengers. A convoy of logging trucks boomed by, their wake a vacuum that made the big Cadillac shudder. Kype couldn't see Nell or D'Angelo, but he listened to the sounds they made, to their voices.

"Don't look back," he heard D'Angelo say.

In Neah Bay the road ran out, dissolving into a patch of packed dirt and windblown sand, the Makah Nation. A few white shacks lined either side of the street. One of the houses looked like the site of a massive collision. Smashed vehicles surrounded it. Doors, bumpers, bucket seats, and radiators were piled in the yard. A few intact cars that had probably seen the open road for the last time when Eisenhower was President seemed to be under repair. A beat DeSoto with a broken windshield and sun-hardened tires, its rims sunk in the sand, was parked beneath a shade tree. Above it, a half-stripped engine dangled from a winch, rocking back and forth as the branches swayed in the breeze. An open toolbox and a coffee cup sat on the fender.

"That must be the chief's house," D'Angelo said.

When Nell sat up, one of her small breasts showed, the nipple dark brown like a knot in wood. It glistened with saliva. She tied the tails of her shirt together.

"Salmon season closes today, fellas," she said.

"How about that?" Kype said. "The ocean must be the spot. My grandfather's spirit guides us."

"Here's to Grandpa," Nell said, taking a long drink from the bottle.

"Here *is* Grandpa," D'Angelo said, holding up the urn. He unscrewed the cap, poked his fingers in, and marked a cross on Nell's forehead. "Ashes to ashes," he said. "And dust to dust."

"Please don't fuck around with that," Kype said.

Grains of blowing sand needled the sides of the car. Dense forest seemed to slide down from the hills, crowding the village against the sea. At the far end of the dirt plaza, the sign for a bait shop sputtered, its red neon bleeding into the fog.

"I'm going to check on my baby," Nell said. She pulled back her hair and adjusted the clip. "I'll be right back."

"Don't forget your cousin," D'Angelo said. He slapped Kype on the back. "For my friend here."

The first pale cast of light shone inland, a faint silver rim, like a lid ajar, in the world they'd left behind. Slowly the street wakened to life. A few lamps went on, glowing a cold yellow in the salt-whitened windows of the shacks. A young girl walked toward the water, watching the sun rise, and a hesitant old man left a trail of footprints in the dust as he crossed the road. A boy with a net began scooping bait from a blue plastic pool. Kype stood beside him. The boy flicked his wrist and twisted the net through hundreds of small dark fish, then emptied his catch into a clear plastic bag and tied it shut. In Kype's hand, the bag squirmed with life, beating like a heart, and then slowly stilled to a few last fitful flickers as the herring suffocated.

"Got our bait?" D'Angelo said.

Kype showed him the dead herring.

When he saw Nell, D'Angelo asked, "Where's your cousin?"

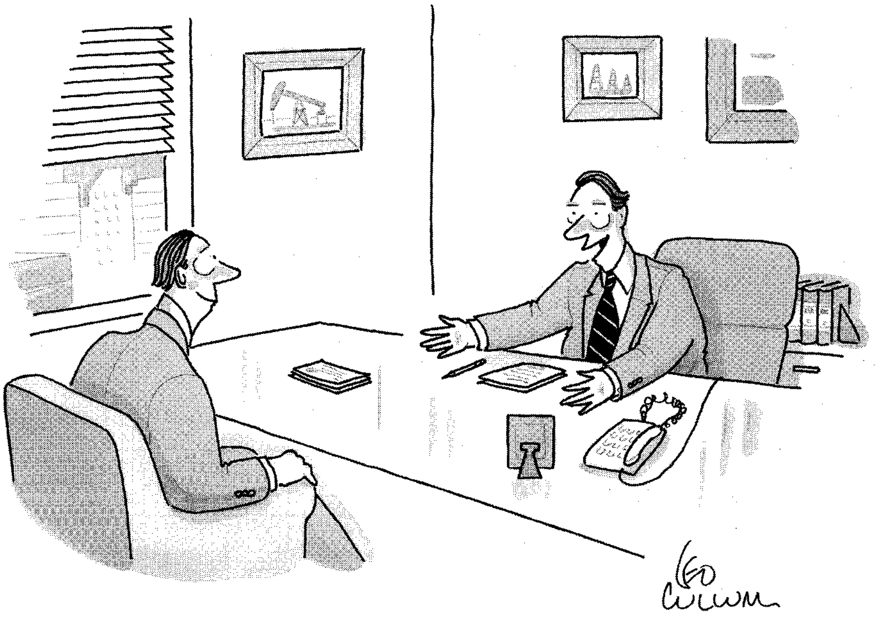
"She's sick of fish," Nell said.

Inside the bait shop, a steel coffee pot percolated, bubbling with the first brew of the day. A plume of steam rose from beneath its rattling lid. A few charter operators sat on a bench, waiting for customers.

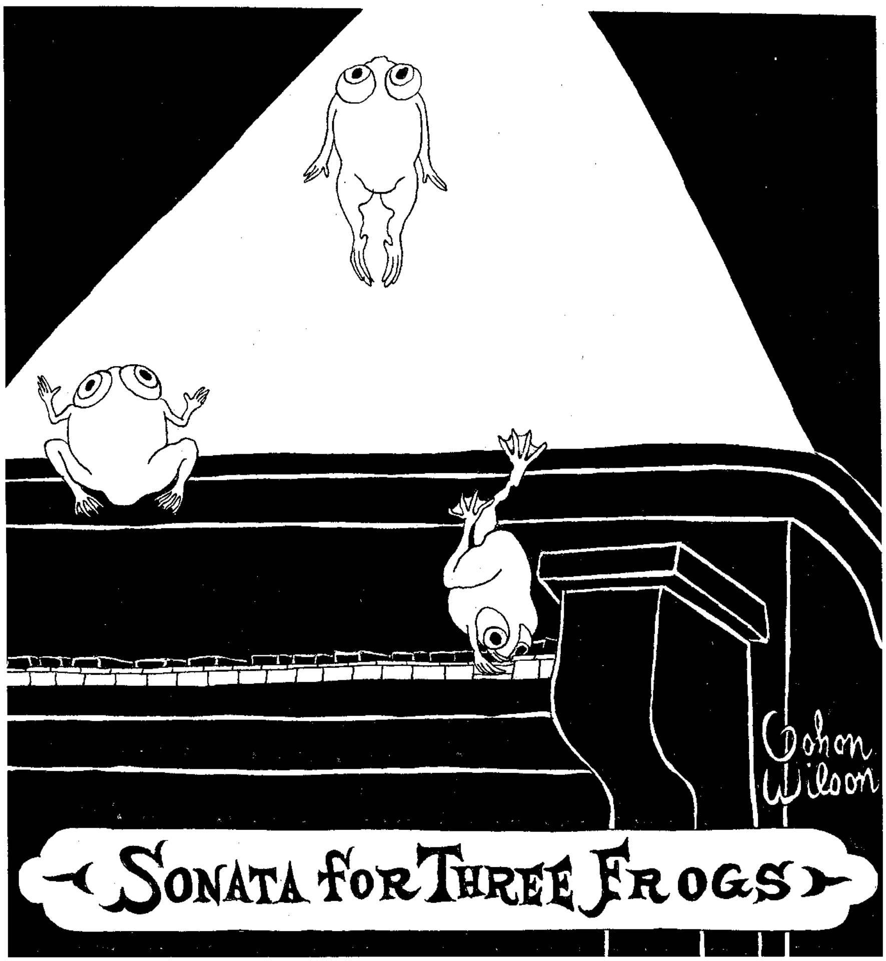
"We need a boat," Kype said.

A man named Porter rose stiffly on arthritic knees. He studied Kype's smooth white skin, his blue eyes, the easy loose movement of his arms and legs as he approached the counter. Kype was wearing his grandfather's clothes: the thin yellow windbreaker, a pink oxford shirt, khakis with an elastic waistband, a pair of leather boat shoes.

"And I want it exclusive," Kype said. "There's three of us."



"It's not just the church that needs evangelists. So does big oil."



"Can't give it to you exclusive," Porter said.

Kype unfolded his wallet. "I'll buy up the other spots."

Porter looked at the neat square edge of new bills crowding the wallet.

"You'll pay for twelve?" he asked, although his boat would accommodate only six.

"No problem," Kype said.

He spread a fan of bills across the counter, paying for the phantom spots, paying for their tackle and bait, their lunches and their fishing licenses, too.

"Slip five," Porter said. "She's called Kingdom Come."

He led them out to the marina. Cabin lights had come on in some of the pleasure craft. A few men huddled on the docks, sipping coffee.

Kype loosened the bowline from a wooden cleat. D'Angelo and Nell kissed under the blue light of an arc lamp.

"That girl your friend's with," Porter said, "she's not right in the head. She's the rez punch, you know what I mean? You can charter her easy as you can charter me. She's got a kid, and herself only a kid. They live with the great-grandmother. I hate to see it."

Porter ran the bilge and checked the radio.

"This old can seaworthy, Captain?" D'Angelo said.

"Was yesterday," Porter said. He looked at Nell. "You go on home."

She got in the boat.

Porter ran the throttle full-open, watching from the wheelhouse as Kype and D'Angelo and Nell stood in the bow. When they were three miles out, he idled back and headed south along the coast.

He shouted over the droning engine, "It's now or never."

Kype assembled his salmon rod, sliding the ferrules together, and then Porter baited his hook. The herring had been kept on ice and were cold and firm. Porter double-hooked the bait, running one snelled hook through the head and the other through the tail, snugging them together so the herring curled and would then spin and twist beneath the water, turning with a wounded motion. When he was finished, Porter decided to set up a rod for himself in the downrigger.

Nell was lying on the hatch, the long skirt she'd changed into bunched up around her thighs, her brown face turning soft and shapeless as putty in the warm sun. D'Angelo sat in the bow, nervously tightening the straps on a bright-orange life preserver. Kype held his grandfather's rod as if it were a golden staff and he a sentry assigned guardianship of the sea.

"Reading the will's going to be something," Kype said. "You know what my program is, from now on? Exhaustion. That's it, exhaustion. That's my ambition. I'm just going to go everywhere and do everything and then get totally sick and tired of it all."

"That a boy, Kypester," D'Angelo said. "You'll be like Ecclesiastes, Jr., all fucking worn out and shit." D'Angelo slid closer to Nell. "Hey, Nell, Miss Ides, you want to hear about his inheritance?"

"You're blocking my sun," she said.

Kype had never fished much—his grandfather liked to go alone—and each tug of the bait and spin of the spoon lure felt like a strike to him. Twice he reeled in, and twice found nothing. He stripped out line in two-foot lengths, measuring as Porter had showed him, until he reached seventy feet. He traced the white thread of monofilament from his rod tip into the sea and then followed it below the surface until the line disappeared in the green water, beyond the reach of light. He felt a strange resignation, not knowing a thing about salmon. Given over to the rise and fall of the boat, he was lulled into a forgetfulness, the heave of the ocean working its way into his bones, softening them. He eased the cork butt of the rod against his navel and shut his eyes and felt the ocean in his stomach, calmly rolling on. He imagined the bait beneath the surface, moving back and forth in slow undulations, like a kite in the sky.

The strike called Kype back to himself. In panic he jerked the rod and started reeling in, watching the line cut wildly across the surface. The pole curled over like a scythe. He reeled as fast as he could, instinctively afraid that the life on the other end of the line would escape him. And it was life, life struggling so mightily that the rod seemed to Kype like a sensitive instrument measuring the fight not only of the salmon but of the entire ocean. He was so beside himself with excitement he made a promise—to God, it seemed—that if he were lucky enough to land this fish he would commemorate the event by spreading his grandfather's ashes over the water. *Life!* Kype kept thinking, *life!* And then, for a moment, the priority of things reversed, and he felt that whatever was fighting on the other end of the line had suddenly engaged in a tug-of-war and was trying to haul him overboard into the sea.

Then the rod snapped straight, and the life in the line was gone.

Kype reeled in quickly, hoping that perhaps the salmon had simply given up the ghost. But it wasn't so: whatever it was had spat the hook. The herring was stripped to the bone, just a head with eyes trailed by a white comb of cartilage and vertebrae.

He set his rod aside.

Porter had also got a strike. He played it leisurely, allowing the fish to exhaust itself in several long streaking runs, and then brought it up against the boat and scooped it with the landing net. He lifted the net high, the salmon thrashing the air, throwing off a spray of water with each spasm. Porter grabbed a gaff hook and raised the butt end over his shoulder and then hesitated—he looked at Kype and said, "You want it?"

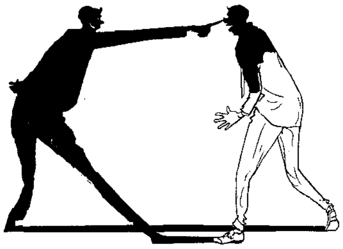
"Yeah, sure," Kype said. "I lost mine."

Porter clubbed the silver in the back of the head. He did it once, hard, mercifully. Blood trickled from its eyes, its caudal fin twitched and a shiver uncoiled along the length of its body, and it was done.

Nell's house was entirely embosked in blackberry. A thorny tangled patch of brambles, a grotesque confusion of growth, twenty feet high, rolled like a rogue wave over the roof. A hole in the vines gave way to a set of gray weathered planks, each board slanted and wobbling, which led to a gated entry. Beyond the gate was a small teak door, cockeyed in its frame, with layers of dry varnish peeling away. Its upper hinge was broken and had been replaced with a strap of leather. Dusty beams of sunlight filtered down through the dome of stickers, and a few bees, humming in the last warmth of the day, moved lazily among the delicate white flowers. Berries hung everywhere, black and ripe, redolent and sweet, weighing the branches down. The house listed to one side, and Kype realized why when he looked up a narrow set of steps and saw the flying bridge. The house was not a house; it was a boat.

An old woman sat in the dark cool galley with a blanket on her lap. Nell touched the woman's shoulder and continued on toward the bow of the boat, into the forecastle. D'Angelo followed, and soon Kype heard them giggling and wrestling on the bunk. Kype stared at the old woman, whose face flowed smoothly, like rock eroded by waves. Her eyes were a silverish silt-green and sat in their sockets like marquetry. Kype stood with his fish in one hand and the urn of ashes in the other and didn't know what to say. Light and shadow entwined her face, and around her forehead she wore an odd red crown woven from cedar. She didn't move or acknowledge him in any manner. The ancient smell of fish rose from a hold that hadn't seen a salmon in decades. Kype listened to the stupefying murmur of the bees, a drowsy buzz that now resided as an itch in his ear. He stuck his finger in, as deep as it would go, digging and scratching at the irritation, then pulled at the lobe.

We didn't know what on earth it was when the ship came into the harbor. So the chief, he sent out some warriors in a couple of canoes to see what it was. They were taking a good look at those white people on the deck there.



Kype raised his salmon by the gill and stared into its face as if it had spoken.

One white man had a real hooked nose, you know. And one of the men was saying to this other guy, "See, see. He must have been a dog salmon, that guy there. He's got a hooked nose." The other guy was looking at him, and a man came out of the galley and he was a hunchback. And the other one said, "Yes! We're right, we're right. Look at that one. He's a humpback. He's a humpback salmon."

Kype shook the urn at his ear but heard only the dicelike rattle of bones and teeth.

So they went ashore and they told the big chief, "You know what we saw? They've got white skin. But we're pretty sure that those people on the floating thing there, they must have been fish. But they've come here as people."

Kype looked at the old woman, whose silver eyes had closed, the leather of her lids lowered like shades. He was still hearing the story, a steady, somewhat distant drone of words, like the sound of an alarm in another room heard from inside a dream. He swallowed hard to clear the pressure in his ears and reached for a lamp stand, trying to steady himself, but swiped empty air as the house yawed and his rubbery legs buckled. He turned and bolted aft, up the steps to deck level, down the crooked gangway, through the cavernous tunnel and out. He ran into the middle of the road and waited in the white dusty light until Nell and D'Angelo emerged from the boat, blinking like tired children.

Nell led them to a corrugated-tin shed, where they found, in a walk-in refrigerator, cases of milk in pint cartons, stacked to the ceiling. D'Angelo hoisted one of the cases onto his shoulder and they marched off along a path spongy with duff and down a steep crooked trail until they came to a tiny inlet. A small stream, not ten feet wide, spilled into an estuarial flat choked with eelgrass and then into the ocean. They forded the stream and came to a campsite. A bleached stick, pitted like old bone, had been jabbed in the sand. Bird feathers, clamshells, and the pinnate fronds of a sword fern, dried brown, were strung together, dangling from the stick and fluttering in the wind. Nell sat down and hitched her skirt up over her knees, gathering the loose folds in her hands.

"You can light a fire there," she said.

Kype and D'Angelo stared at each other.

"Are you men or what?" Nell asked. "Gather wood up and light a fire or we're gonna freeze our asses when the sun goes down."

They stripped moss and bark from the trees and hauled several loads of driftwood and then stopped by the stream for a drink. It was a beautiful little stream, the water pure and clear as crystal, shining with light, but the banks were stacked with dead fish. They were drying in the sand and swarming with flies, their skin baked a golden bronze by the sun, or they were caught up in the weeds along shore, rotting in the shallow water. Their eye sockets were empty and their long ragged teeth were bared as if to scare away scavengers. "I guess I'm not thirsty," D'Angelo said. "What the fuck's wrong with these fish?" The living didn't look any better than the dead. They were thin and mutilated, their flesh ripped and trailing from their bodies like rags. Some of these haunted fish were hardly motile, finning weakly in the shallow stream, while others, ravaged by parasites, were alive but so near death they were already decomposing.

"You gonna cook that salmon?" Nell asked, when the fire caught and began to bank up.

"Sure he is," D'Angelo said.

Kype asked, "Who was that old woman?"

"That's my great-grandma," Nell said. "I bet she's older 'n your grandpa and she ain't in no jewelry box, either."

"She wasn't what you'd call friendly." Kype hadn't brought a knife but he patted his pockets anyway.

"She probably didn't even know you were there. She's blind."

"Bullshit," Kype said.

"Bullshit you," Nell said.

"She looked right at me. She knew I was there all right. She talked to me. She told me a story."

"You maybe heard something, but you didn't hear her. She doesn't talk. She stopped a while back."

"I'm telling you, she spoke to me."

"Cut up that fish," Nell said.

"I didn't bring a knife."

D'Angelo hopped to, arranging a row of the square pint cartons along the top of a gray drift log. Empty shotgun shells and spent casings marked the location of an earlier milk massacre. Old cartons sat in the sand, giving off a soured reek.

"Gummerment milk," Nell explained. "We don't know what to do with it all. We drink a little and shoot the rest."

D'Angelo said, "I can't wait."

"My grandfather got that gun out of the Everett morgue," Kype said. "From a friend who worked there. He had a bucket of guns just lying around."

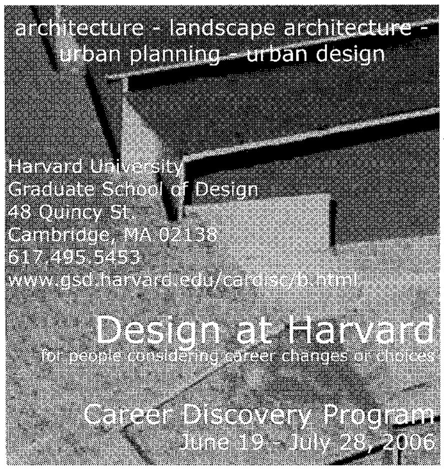
D'Angelo said, "That musta been way back yonder in nineteen ought something or other, wasn't it?"

"I don't know," Kype said glumly.

He removed his boat shoes and burrowed his pale-pink feet in the sand. He stepped into the stream and started walking through the throng of dead and dying salmon toward the beach. A glassy wet margin of sand, where the waves of a rising tide turned back, left a wrack of sea lettuce and sand dollars and long whiplike ropes of kelp. Kype stood in the churning white froth, waves collapsing around him; a blueness had crept into the light. Cormorants gathered on the rocks and dried their wings, their heads turned aside and their black wings outspread like robed priests offering a benediction.

When Kype returned, Nell was gutting their salmon with the shell of a razor clam she'd whetted against a rock. Kype stood behind her and saw how the firelight brought the red in her hair to the surface. She'd been singing to herself and then she stopped and turned and said, "Hey, asshole." He moved out of her light and her song resumed. Nell skewered the salmon with sticks, interlacing several deft sutures through the meat, and then she cantilevered the whole fish over the fire with a tree branch staked in the sand. The unadorned fillets began sizzling, the skin dripping gobbets of crackling fat on the coals.

"Kype." D'Angelo's voice echoed off the wet rock walls of the tiny cove and, reverberating, seemed to call Kype's name from out at sea. "I'd say this is your spot."



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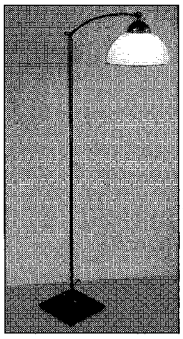

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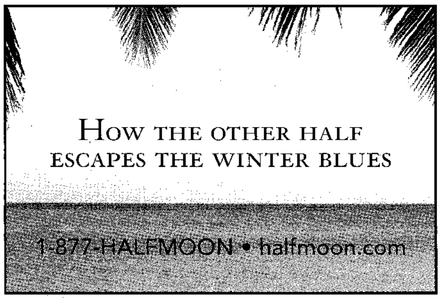

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"I'm not feeling it."

"You're running out of choices, Buddha-boy."

"I think I'll head back," Kype said. "It's been a long day."

"You can't leave me out here."

"You can't leave, period," Nell said.

"Three's a crowd. You guys enjoy the salmon."

"The trail's underwater," Nell said. "You have to wait for the tide to change."

"Underwater?"

"Not forever. It goes back out, don'tcha know? All you have to do is wait."

Kype pulled at the salmon with his fingers. The pink flesh was fatty and moist, with a smoky wood flavor. He folded the crisp skin in half and ate that, too. Finished, he picked his teeth with a white bone and said, "The old woman told me we were fish."

Nell said, "You were hearing things."

"I know what I heard," Kype said.

"She don't talk."

"She talked to me."

"Well, I'm just a dumb Injun," Nell said. "Maybe it's me that's gone deaf."

"How long until the tide changes?" Kype asked.

"Quit whining," Nell said. "But, uh, you only bring that one bottle?"

"Let's do some shooting," D'Angelo said.

They left Nell by the fire, walking off thirty paces, arguing ballistics as they searched for an angle where they weren't likely to get themselves killed by ricocheting bullets.

Kype loaded the gun. "Let's wager," he said.

"Oh, a wager, how delightful," D'Angelo said, in a mocking highfalutin accent. "Well, O.K., old chap, old sport, let's see—my harmonica against your Cadillac."

"That's not fair."

"Fuck fair, Kype. You're about to inherit a fortune. You're done with fair. Fair is for losers." He ran a hand through his greasy hair and said, "I'll throw in my bolo."

"I want Nell."

"Oh," D'Angelo said. "O.K."

Kype shot first and missed. He'd never used a gun before, and he had expected something monumental, a big bang and some kick, but the pistol was tiny, nearly a toy, and it made only a faint, insignificant pop against the waves resounding in the cove.

"My turn," D'Angelo said.

"I only get one shot?"

"If you miss it's not your turn anymore." D'Angelo frowned, shaking his head. "Everybody knows that." He steadied the pistol at his side and then yanked it from an imaginary holster, popping off a shot that managed to plug the carton cleanly. "Oh, yeah," he said, stopping to watch the stream of milk bleed into the sand. "That's the way you do it." The next shot exploded in a spray of white. The tattered box fell into the river, spilling milk, and drifted away.

"Never thought I'd be shooting milk when I left Brooklyn," D'Angelo said.

"Why'd you leave?" Kype asked.

"I always had that dream, to hitchhike out West."

"I never did."

"Where the hell would you go?" D'Angelo said, sweeping the barrel of the gun across the horizon. "Swimming, I guess."

"Let me see the gun."

"I haven't missed yet, Kype. It's still my turn. Why don't you get us some of that hooch? This shooting is giving me a thirst."

Kype went for the bottle but Nell refused to give it up and he returned empty-handed.

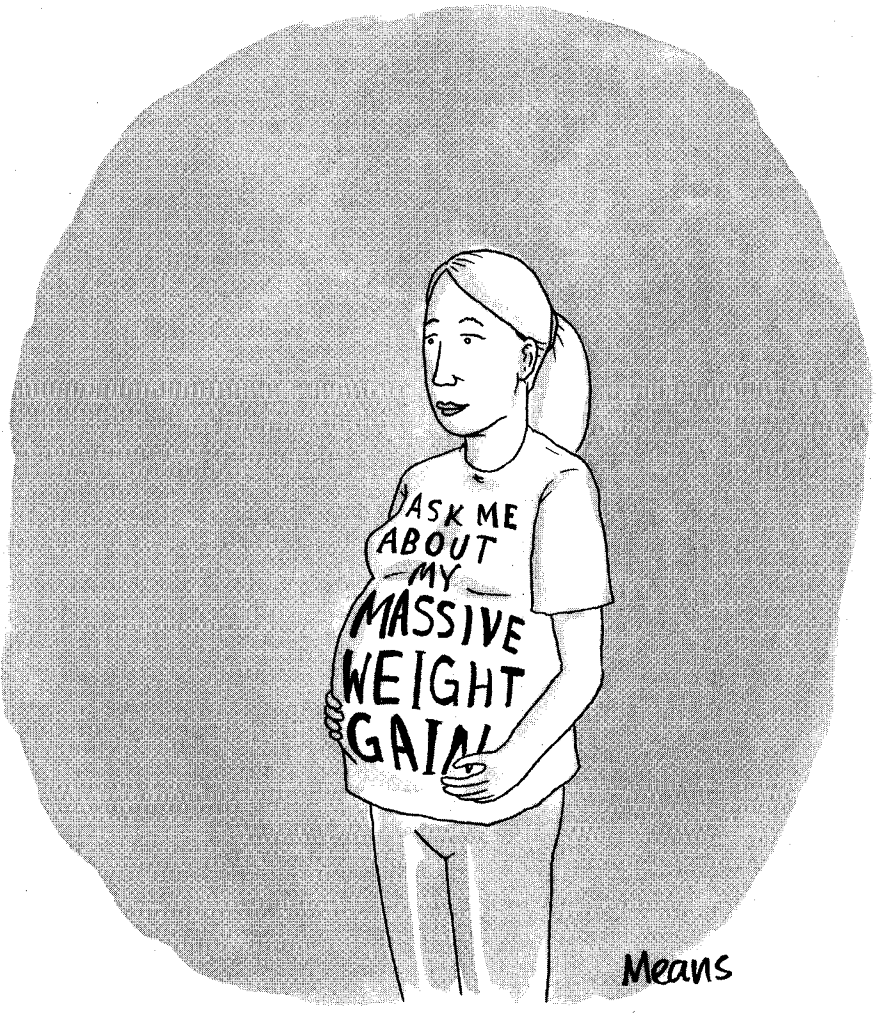
"But this isn't the West anymore," D'Angelo said. "It's like west of the West, or something."

"Let me take a shot."

"Kype, if I have to tell you one more time, I'm going to shoot *you*."

Kype wondered if the new life awaiting him after probate would be like this, lived among strangers. He would inherit a fortune but never feel entirely at home.

"I thought there'd be something else," D'Angelo said. "It's disappointing. It's making me lonesome. Nothing but


ASK ME ABOUT MY MASSIVE WEIGHT GAIN
Means

"Better show my three-o'clock in, Yolanda. He has been waiting."

• •

stinking fish and the ocean. It's no wonder you can't find your spot, Kype. From out here, you have to go east to get to the West."

"What are you talking about?"

"We need to reload." D'Angelo handed him the pistol. "But it's still my turn."

"Why do you get the girl?"

"She smells like fish," D'Angelo said. "Just like everything else around here."

Kype fed a shell into each chamber and closed the cylinder and gave it a spin. Then he made a break for it. D'Angelo lunged for him, but Kype juked across the beach, and when he reached the log he shoved the barrel of the gun against the belly of the first carton and shot it. He shot the one next to it; and he shot the one next to that. He tossed one of the milks in the air and tried to shoot it on the wing, missing wildly as the carton zoomed out of the sky, but after it caromed off his head and came to rest in the sand, plopping at his feet, he shot it twice for good measure. He mowed them down, picking off carton after carton, and when he ran out of bullets he grabbed the hot barrel and beat the last few milks with the butt of the gun, hammering away until the seams burst and the waxed cardboard turned to pulp. He caught his breath, looking over the carnage. The milks were slaughtered, and his shirt was soaked. Downstream the dark humped backs of the migrating salmon stirred indifferently in water that had turned cloudy white.

"Happy, Buddha-man?" D'Angelo brushed sand off his pleated pants and shook out the cuffs. "Now give me the gun."

"We're out of milk, my friend," Kype said. "I shot the last milk. They're all dead."

"Some sport you are."

"There's nothing left," Kype said, handing over the gun and the crumpled box of ammo.

"There's you," D'Angelo said. He cinched up his bolo tie, flexed the fingers of his right hand, and squinted at Kype. "And there's these fucking fish."

His first shot pierced the eye of an old buck with a bony face and a long, grim snout that curled like a brass coat hook. It had been holding in some quiet water behind a rock, and, when the bullet entered its brain, it merely let go and was borne gently downstream. D'Angelo knelt near the bank and bumped off two more of the weary, spent fish. They flopped in the shallows, their blood pouring out pink as it mixed with the milk. D'Angelo hardly bothered to aim. Every blind shot killed. He blasted the adipose fin off a hen. He popped another fish in the belly. He shot one that was already dead, and the salmon dissolved, drifting away like a cloud. He stopped to reload, slipping the last shell into the chamber while eying Kype, who turned away and watched the stream flow by. The remaining fish, undisturbed, went about their business. A mating pair wove in the current above a redd, braiding the water with their bodies, releasing eggs and milt as if pollinating a flower. The hen eventually dropped back to fan gravel over the nest and cover her fertilized eggs and D'Angelo raised the gun and fired and she died without much agony, just a shiver and then her slowly gaping mouth, faintly protesting, as the current drew her down to the sea.

"I oughta make you fuckers eat those dead fish!" Nell said. She was holding the urn and the bottle of bourbon hostage in her lap. "Those are my ancestors, you know. You killed my people!"

"I'm sorry about your fish," D'Angelo said. "And I'm sorry about your ancestors, too, but I think we're just gonna have to let bygones be bygones. I don't see any other solution. Be reasonable."

"You be reasonable!" Nell shouted.

"We're just going around in circles here," D'Angelo said. "Young Kype wants Old Kype's ashes back and Nell, honeybunch, what is it you want?"

"I told you already." She scooped out a handful of ashes and broadcast them into the river as if sowing seed.

"Please don't throw any more of those ashes," Kype said.

"Those fish were all sick," D'Angelo said.

She shook the urn in their faces. "This guy is dead! And you want him back, this burned-up old Ashtray Man!"

They had been fighting forever, shouting over the waves, as the cove filled like a bowl, first with shadows, then with night. Now the moon was directly above them, a nimbus floating in the fog, as vague as a coin at the bottom of a well. Kype was cold and shivering in his clammy shirt.

"I'm thirsty," he said.

"Have some milk," Nell said.

D'Angelo coaxed heat from the fire, stirring the embers, and then drew the harmonica from his shirt pocket. He tapped spit from the blowholes and then twisted his mouth over the instrument, but the miserable honking was no match for the sound of the crashing surf. He threw the harmonica at Nell. "Might as well have that, too," he said.

"They come here so we can eat," Nell said. "What if they don't come back next year?" She looked at both men, waiting for an answer. "That old woman, my great-grandmother, came here to bathe and pray every morning of her life."

"I can't swim," D'Angelo said.

Under cover of dark, Kype stared at Nell. She had flat wide cheekbones like the Sphinx and he imagined that for a kiss all he would have to do was hold those bones, tip her head forward, and drink from her face.

"O.K.," he said. "I'll do it."

"Smart man," Nell said. "Otherwise bad spooky shit was gonna follow you everywhere and forever."

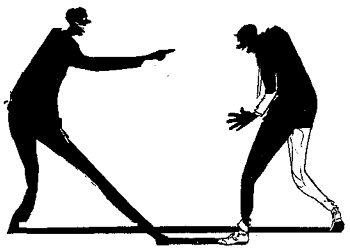
Nell patted a place in the sand and told Kype to lie down. She muddled ash and bourbon in the palm of her hand and then dipped her finger in the paste and painted a thick line down the middle of Kype's forehead. "After this," she said, "we'll play the bone game." She traced two circles around his eyes, enlarging them, and then brushed a black streak across each temple, giving him pointed ears. "You can win back the rest of these ashes," she said. "I'm giving you that chance." She drew fangs on either side of his mouth and whiskers that dashed away from his nose. "And then you got to go in that stream and clean yourself up," she said, unbuttoning Kype's shirt, "because you stink real bad. The spirits won't come near you." On his belly she made a school of crude fish, each like a lopsided Möbius strip. They swam out of his navel toward his heart and then migrated across his collarbone and up his throat to his mouth.

Kype lay very still, hoping that Nell would draw fish on him forever.

She said, "You got to get your soul back in your head. Somebody stole it, that's my guess. Maybe it happened while you were sleeping. Or maybe you got a bad scare and it just jumped out of you. You ever feel the top of your head moving?"

And just then he did, as if the top of his skull had been opened like a jar. Calmed by the flutter of Nell's fingers at his throat, Kype closed his eyes and was surprised at the sudden vision of his grandfather, who slipped a hand in his and led him into the lobby of what had once been a very fine hotel. Now it seemed to be a home for retired sailors. Mariners sat in stuffed chairs and on dusty couches. The light in the lobby was dim and the air was dead-still and Kype suspected that even the hearts beating beneath the seafarers' soup-stained shirts pumped like old leather bellows and blew nothing but gray ash. No one spoke a word. It was as if these sailors had been drawn back through time into a private darkness and all the waters of the world had retreated and finally gathered in their eyes, glassy reflections that floated like mirages on the surface of their dry and deserted faces.

Kype's grandfather pointed to the top of a grand staircase. When Kype reached the landing, he looked back, but the old man waved goodbye, and Kype continued on alone, down a long corridor, sensing that the moment he'd been promised all his life was now upon him. The hotel's glory days still hung in the air, still haunted the rooms and halls. The velveteen wallpaper suggested a gay opulence gone seedy, empty linen closets lined the dark hallways, and dumbwaiters rose from a kitchen full of cold stoves. All the rooms had long braided cords, thick gold ropes that had once rung service bells but now summoned nothing. A door to one of the rooms opened, and Kype stood outside, where he watched a sailor twist his service rope into a noose and hang himself. Had the bells been working the old man might have lived, inadvertently calling for help as he swayed back and forth, but the tongues had been clipped long ago, and in the silence of that hotel the hoisted sailor strangled. Kype alone had a voice, but when he screamed for help a dove flushed from his mouth, crying, *Alas, alas*, and all he could do was stand in the hall and watch. The sailor died swinging, as if by a lanyard, in the empty air



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above his bed. A deeper quiet settled in the room, like the moral at the end of a fable. Kype now felt that he knew what all the sailors in the lobby knew.

But that knowledge vanished as he opened his eyes. Nell was breaking a stick in half, marking one of the pieces with a band of black ash and leaving the other plain. He understood the rules even before she explained them, as if he'd played the bone game in a past life. Nell would shuffle the sticks behind her back and then all Kype had to do was point left or right and pick the one without the ash. For the first round, just to be fair, Nell agreed to put up her rhinestone hair clip against Kype's Cadillac.

"John Wayne gave it to my great-grandmother," she said.

"He just came up here and gave it to her?" D'Angelo said.

"It used to belong to Pilar."

"Just pulled in and said, 'Hiya, Grannie, I'm John Wayne, here's a hair clip'?"

"All those guys used to sail up from Hollywood in their yachts. John Wayne, Bing Crosby, Clark Gable. They came here to fish for salmon and they didn't use no guns, either."

Nell hid her hands behind her back, shuffling the sticks, moving in tune to a song that seemed to have no real words and therefore, to Kype, at least, no beginning and no end. Over and over she sang *he-ha-ya-ho-ho-ha-ya-ho-he*, a loop of sound that made no more sense to Kype than the surf or the wind. He looked long and hard at her face, trying to see the truth, but his first guess was wrong, and so was his second, and in a matter of a few minutes he'd lost his car and his shoes. She shuffled and sang and Kype pointed to Nell's right hand, and she showed him, once again, the unmarked stick. Between rounds Nell drummed, beating Kype's shoes against a log, but the cadence was off, it seemed crazy and disruptive, working against the heart's rhythm. The jumbled pounding made Kype tense and excited; it confused and deranged him, and then Nell started weaving taunts into her song. "You're blind, *he-ha-ya-ho*," she sang. "You can't see, *ho-ha-ya-ho-he*." As a game, it seemed no more complicated than a coin toss, and Kype kept playing, believing the odds would naturally swing in his favor. All he needed was time. "*He-ha-ya-ho*, your head's got no top." Nell now had the urn, the Eldorado, the bourbon, the harmonica, and the gun. Kype had never won games, although his life had always been presented to him as a kind of victory. He unbuckled his wristwatch. He lost his pants and the contents of his pockets. He discovered that losing didn't really bother him. It wasn't nearly the disaster he would have imagined. When his wallet was emptied of cash, he started writing I.O.U.s on old credit-card receipts. He pledged his collection of baseball cards, his Mickey Mantle, his Willie Mays, even pawning his autographed Don Mincher from the 1969 Seattle Pilots. Nell's drumming drove time out of his mind. Unable to stop himself, he began to gamble away little pieces of his inheritance—an antique dining set and a muffineer and a box of costume jewelry that would complement Nell's hair clip. He stood before her in his forlorn saggy white briefs but he didn't feel cold. He had nothing, like all the great men—like Gandhi. Nothing, like Jesus. Nothing, like the Buddha!

Nothing! he thought. *Nothing!*

"Now you've got to swim," Nell said.

It was a shallow stream, but the current was strong. Kype clawed at the bed, his belly scraping over rocks, his ribs stabbed by snags that jutted from the banks. The slither of salmon passing over his back or brushing by his face gave Kype the feeling that he was running a gantlet, that hands were grabbing at him. He tried to fight his way upstream, but was tugged by his feet toward the sea. He took a deep breath and dunked below the surface. It was noisy, turbulent, not the quiet he had expected, and the water tasted like dirt. That surprised him, the faint scent, the trace of earth in the water, and it filled him with longing. As a lonely, disconsolate boy, he had watched container ships and tankers turn with the tide, watched them all day long, out his grandfather's window, as if in their slow turning they were the hands of a large clock, a clock madly trying to mark time on a face of water. Behind the ships, farther west, he could see the headlands of an island.

The island was privately owned and appeared only in detailed nautical maps, but as a child Kype had believed that it was his: everything that fell away, everything that died, all the broken promises and routine disappointments and lost hopes of his boyhood eventually washed up out there, or so he imagined. For him it was a kind of afterworld across the water, a combination of sacred ground and junkyard. The idea had begun when he reached the age where he understood that he had no father and for weeks he'd consoled himself, imagining that his dad was a desperado who had lammed it across the bay to that island. Later he believed that all the cowboys and Indians had gone to that island, too. Lost marbles, broken toasters, snapped shoelaces, odd socks, old TVs, and an endless series of small pets found a final home out there. The words to the bedtime prayers he no longer said were out there. Anything he couldn't explain was out there. The good friends of his father's whom he called Uncle, the men who came around for a while and then all of a sudden didn't—they'd all left for the island. He hadn't thought about the island in years, but now, as he fought the current, it came back to him with all the vivid romance of his childhood, and he imagined that his grandfather, old Kype, had set sail for that island. Young Kype's soul was out there, too, he was sure of it, and so he kept swimming.

Early the next morning, Kype stood in the dirt plaza outside the bait shop, picking blackberry thorns from his palm. His hands were bleeding and his arms were covered in fish scales, shimmering blue and pink sequins. His stomach was scraped and scarred and a deep bruising beneath his ribs made it hard to breathe. Nell had been asleep, curled in the sand, and D'Angelo had been snoring next to a log, clinging to it, perhaps afraid that he'd be swept out to sea. Kype had left them there, dressing quickly, grabbing the gun and what remained of his grandfather's ashes and his car keys, wading quietly into the teeming river, through the crowd of spawning salmon. The stream was full, the dying still dying, the living continuing their run, while yesterday's dead had been washed out to sea, making room for today's. A couple of milk cartons hung in the reeds, but the water had cleared and was once again bright as crystal and shining with light. Kype knelt in the water and held one of the battered fish by the belly and looked into its eye, wondering what it might be thinking. He bowed his head and placed a kiss on the salmon's cold lips, and then he eased the fish back into the river, letting it slip through his fingers.

Climbing out of the cove, winding his way up the crooked path, Kype got banged up pretty good, but he had his ashes and his gun, and over there, parked in front of the chief's yard, was the Eldorado. He felt in his pocket for his car keys and found a couple of the hasty I.O.U.s he'd written. In the light of a new day he was no longer able to imagine how Nell could possibly have believed that the bone game was for real. The whole fantastic ordeal seemed like a fevered dream, and as the remnants of last night's hour of faith faded he felt strangely deserted. He cradled the urn in his arms and stood there as the sun rose over the water and the wind came up, blowing sand and dust across the plaza. The small white shacks started to glow. The old woman came outside and sat with her blanket and strange cedar crown, warming her face in the sun. The scene was as stubborn and enduring as a monument, and to Kype it seemed as if the dust rising in whorls off the road had claimed these people, all of them arranged just as they had been the day before. The little girl stood in the street, looking east, shielding her eyes against the rising sun. The old man walked by with the same hesitant shuffle, his feet dragging as he stooped forward and followed his shadow across the road. The engine swayed above the old DeSoto and the open toolbox and the coffee cup still rested on the fender, as if work might begin at any moment. Salmon season was over, but otherwise nothing had changed. ♦

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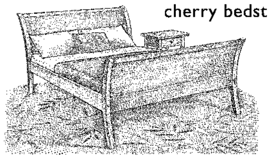

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THE CRITICS

THE ART WORLD

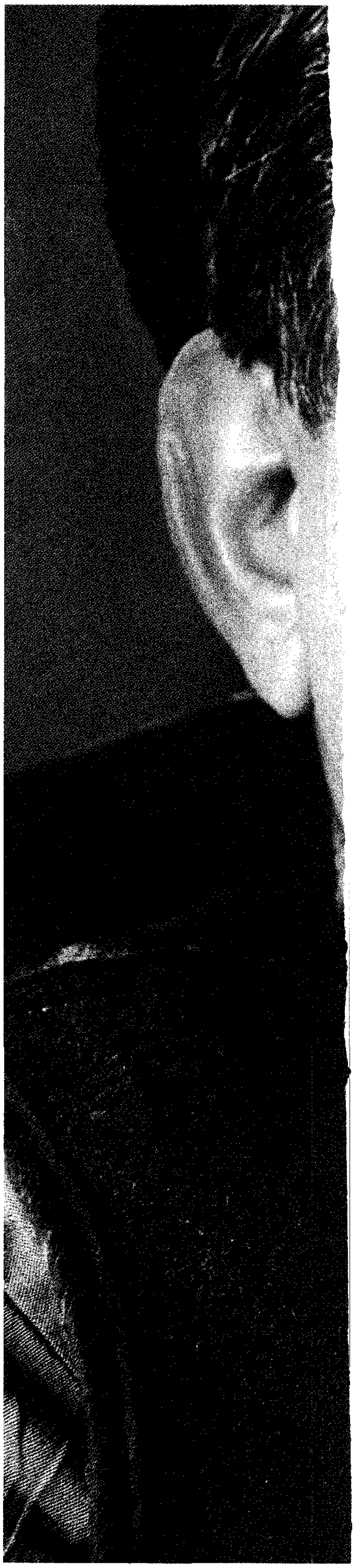
OTHER DIMENSIONS

David Smith's sculptural experiment.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

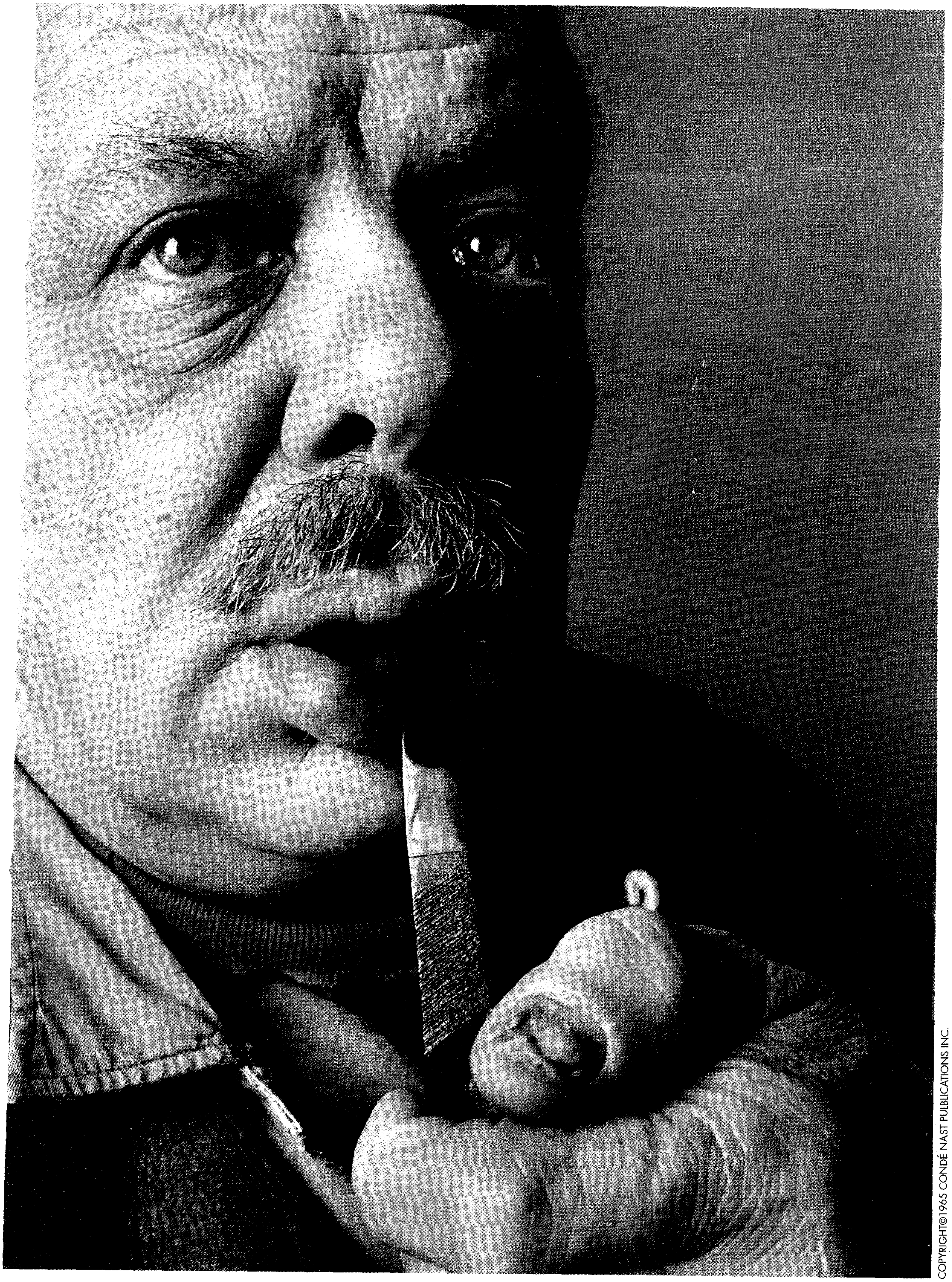
At its best, the David Smith retrospective at the Guggenheim is a pas de deux of sculpture and architecture, each showing the other off to maximum advantage in a rapture of complementary passions. It is beautiful, powerful, and fragile in the way of classical ballet: consummation shivering at the brink of evanescence, which ensues, in this case, as the inevitable, swift breakdown of any aesthetic sensation—and enchantment—so intense and unalloyed. (You wonder, Did I see what I think I saw? and, by the way, What was that?) So it seemed to me, in two or three flashes, as I gazed across Frank Lloyd Wright's atrium at processions of Smith's vigorous poems in welded steel from the nineteen-fifties and early sixties, which have been installed toward the top of the building by the museum's curator of twentieth-century art, Carmen Giménez. (Lower down the ramp, Smith's earlier output, starting with a tiny figure in wire and coral from 1932, makes for an uneven, more usual kind of show, with no special relation to its setting, consisting of dozens of riffs on Cubistic form and Surrealistic style strongly reminiscent of Picasso, Julio González, and, especially, early Giacometti.) Distance and a milky radiance flatten the later works into lyrical ciphers, completing the great helix like musical notes on a spooling staff. Neither the building nor the sculptures will ever look better or seem more self-evident in their historical importance. This makes sense when you reflect that the year the Guggenheim opened, 1959, was close to the midpoint of Smith's artistic maturity, and that it coincided with the last high tide of confidence in modernist progress, which is associated with both the sculptor and the architect. The effect was exalting and, for me, a little embarrassing, like being swept away by the anthem of a lapsed cause that, when I discovered modern art, forty-some years ago, thrilled me utterly.

Smith was the premier—in truth, the only—sculptor in the first rank of the generation of Abstract Expressionism and perhaps its most widely liked artist (not always a propitious sign for an avant-gardist). He came from Indiana; his father was a telephone engineer and part-time inventor, his mother a schoolteacher. He had early job experience working with metal, riveting and spot-welding Studebakers in South Bend. He studied art in Ohio, Washington, D.C., and New York, where he took classes at the Art Students League with John Sloan and the Czech painter Jan Matulka, who was an evangelist for modernism. In 1927, at the age of twenty-one, Smith married the artist Dorothy Dehner, and became a fixture in the impoverished, strenuously aspiring downtown



PHOTOGRAPH BY IRVING PENN

Smith in upstate New York, where he established his fabled studio, in 1964.



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scene, befriending John Graham, Stuart Davis, Arshile Gorky, and Willem de Kooning. In 1933, he created what were probably the first welded-metal sculptures ever made in America. He and Dehner bought land upstate, in Bolton Landing, near Lake George, where he established his fabled studio—Terminal Iron Works, he called it—and lived from 1940 until his death, in 1965, at the age of fifty-nine, from injuries suffered in a car wreck. He was a bearishly charming man, when not too drunk, in his era's hypermasculine mold. He wrote to a friend in 1945, "There is so much to be read—so many women to lay—so much liquor to drink—fish to catch, etc.—but I get the most satisfaction out of my work but I got to have enough of 'that there'—the more I work the more it flows (the concept). . . . Right now I have drawings and thinkings for a year's labor."

Smith's ruling concept, adapted from his European influences (and shared, to an extent, by Alexander Calder), is universally termed "drawing in space": open structures that anticipate being seen in the round but that favor frontal viewing. His first indisputable masterpieces in the mode—the leaping-fish-like "Australia" and the rhythmic, panorama-like "Hudson River Landscape," both from 1951—are more akin, in their sculptural dynamic, to relief than to statuary. They address a chronic aesthetic problem that was noted by Baudelaire, whom the art historian David Anfam quotes in the show's catalogue: "Brutal and positive as nature herself, [sculpture] has at the same time a certain vagueness and ambiguity, because it exhibits too many surfaces at once." The many physical surfaces of a successful Smith coalesce in imagined pictorial unities. Two eyes may be more than you need to enjoy it. When looking at his often overly complex earlier works from angles other than face on, I find it rewarding to banish the pesky third dimension by shutting one eye, and so inducing, as an illusion, the impression of graphic design toward which Smith was laboring. By the early fifties, he had made the trick unnecessary with integral, bold motifs that assert their integrity from any viewpoint. They are as coherently themselves as, say, a car is a car. Smith thereby eliminated distractions from the key appeal of his art: inspiration made visible.

His most exciting works come in series that manifest his irrepressible resourcefulness and alacrity when on a roll—a performer, making it up as he went along. (Not that being uninspired quelled him, as witness the deft but frequently tedious noodling of his multitudinous drawings.) The "Agricolas" (1952-53) incorporate bits of farm implements in airy traceries. "Forgings" (1955-56) present slender standing strips of pounded steel. "Zigs" (1961-64)—my favorites, none of which are in the show—feature relief-like constructions of curving shapes in painted sheet metal on slanted flat surfaces, wittily resting on small, wheeled bases. (Smith grappled ceaselessly with a problem endemic to modern sculpture, which tended to reject the traditional pedestal on principle: how should a work meet the ground?) "Cubis" (1961-65), his best-known and last series (one of which recently sold for $23.8 million, the record for art classed as "contemporary" in the auction market), deploys blocks, bars, circles, and cylinders of brushed, gleaming stainless steel in teetering or tumbling compositions that sometimes look as if they had been thrown into the air and stuck there. His twenty-seven rusty, rugged "Voltri" sculptures (nine of them are in the show), which were fashioned of scrap metal in one month in 1962, at a workshop in Italy, represent a legendary creative burst. They play across a wide range of traditional genres—figure, still-life, landscape—and develop a couple of novel ones: wheeled vehicles for gawky cutout forms ("Voltri VII" suggests a wheelbarrow-tumbril transporting five sad prisoners) and life-size corner workbenches equipped with unidentifiable tools. Certain "Voltris," beheld in silhouette from afar, occasioned my keenest pleasures at the Guggenheim.

But, in retrospect, there is something forced about Smith's triumph, as there is about a lot of other formal modern innovation. His ambition to push sculpture toward painting—like Wright's to make sculpture of architecture with the Guggenheim (which thus savagely upstages most art works shown within it)—mistook the future course of three-dimensional art. That future was commandeered, in the sixties, by the revolutionary rise of minimalism, which upended modernist logic, making painting sculptural (with shaped canvases and assemblage), and sculpture architectural (shifting the focus of aesthetic experience from the static object to the perambulating viewer). In that literal-minded regard, which remains common sense in art today, even the brawniest Smith can seem precious. Smith's work stands exposed in its failure to resolve a fatal question that arises when sculpture flirts with picture-ness: pictures of what? While learning form from European artists in the thirties, he took on board an image repertoire replete with Surrealist platitude: primitivist, Freudian, Jungian, what have you. So did the coming masters of Abstract Expressionism, but the forgiving medium of painting enabled them to dissolve those longueurs into a new kind of picture, whose poetic meaning is inseparable from its material reality. (A classical Pollock, Rothko, or Newman doesn't have an image; it is one.) Minimalism would do the same, at last, for sculpture, in the form of glossy boxes by Donald Judd and sullen tiles by Carl Andre, at the cost of being exquisitely boring to contemplate.

Subsequent artists—Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Martin Puryear, Joel Shapiro—would recover representational and lyrical functions for sculpture, assimilating and disarming minimalist skepticism with a candid, playful self-consciousness. In comparison, Smith's uses of referential elements seem complacent and presumptuous. His abstracted flora and fauna, hints of machines and weaponry, sexual innuendos and hieroglyphic signs, and allusions to Catholic reliquaries and tribal fetishes rarely escape the toils of secondhand sincerity. Bent simply on its own propagation, his work consumes and diminishes the meanings of its putative subjects; even the terrific "Cubis" suffer from a sense of deflating quotation, from standard languages of formal abstraction. Around 1959, say, any content beyond the value of art for art's sake could seem heroic. Smith at the Guggenheim, like a time machine, spins back to that moment, for a while. ♦

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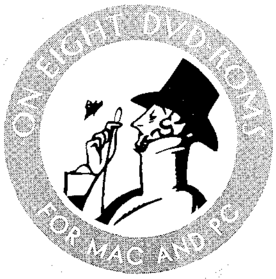

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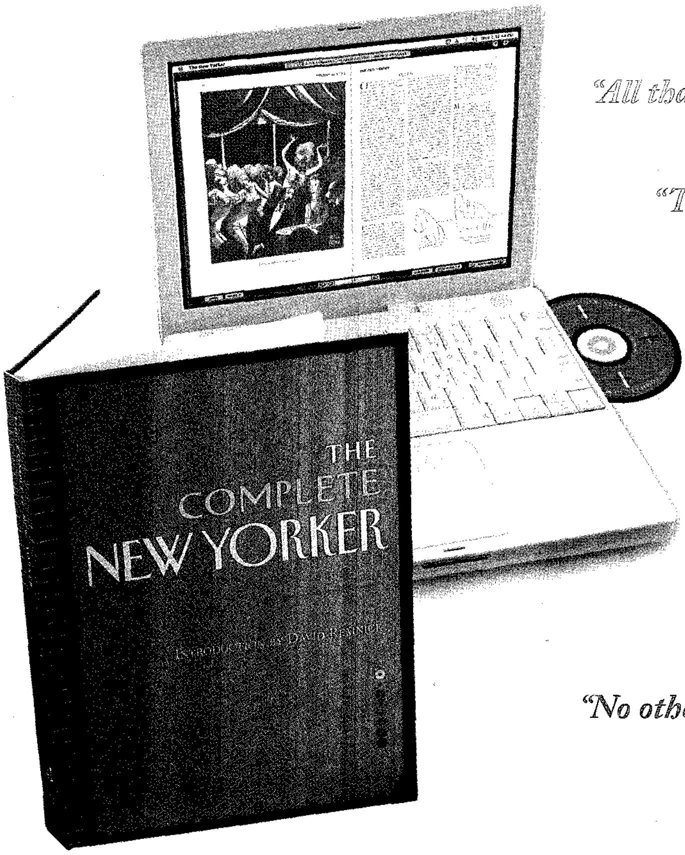

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THE THEATRE

BOOM AND DOOM

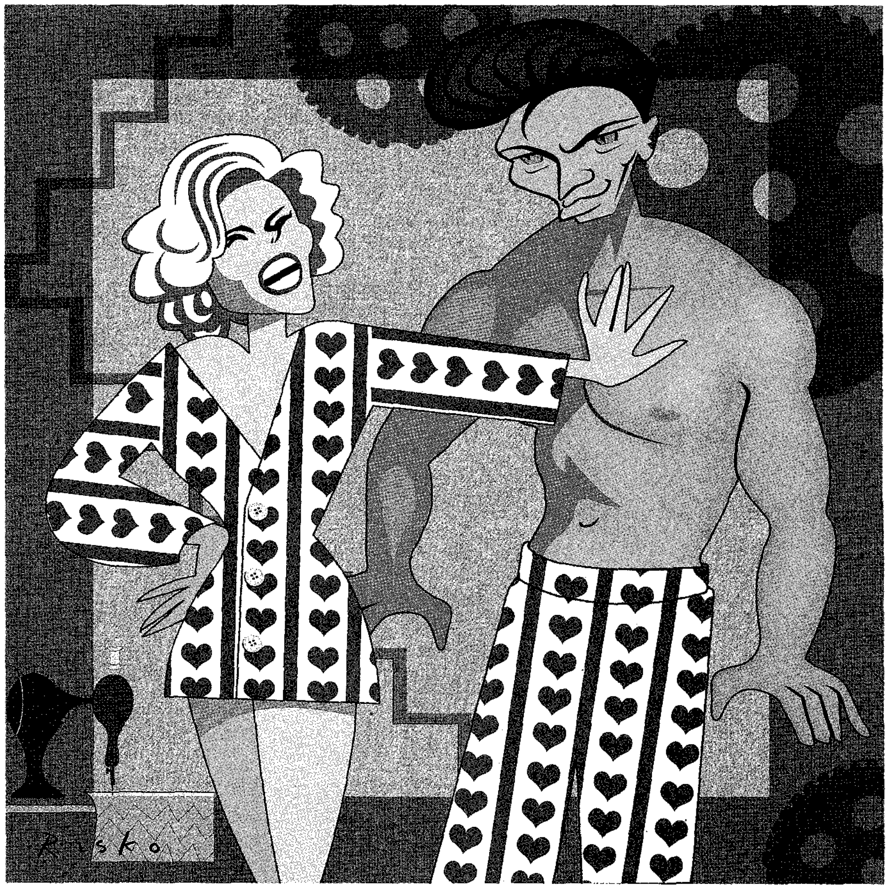
"The Pajama Game" and "The Seven."

BY JOHN LAHR

I went to see "The Pajama Game" in 1954, at the invitation of my godfather, Eddie Foy, Jr., who played Hines, the perennially jealous, stopwatch-toting time-study man at the Sleep Tite pajama factory in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, where the musical's drama of labor and sexual relations is acted out. In the area of sexual relations, Uncle Eddie's legend preceded him: when his wife threatened to leave him, he reportedly nailed all her clothes to the floor. He certainly nailed the part. The show was a smash. With its crafty, unpretentious buoyancy, "The Pajama Game" was a first on Broadway in a number of important ways: it was the first Hal Prince production, and the first show to be choreographed by Bob Fosse; it had the first hit score by Richard Adler and Jerry Ross, and the first significant performance by the dancer Carol Haney (who was later replaced by her understudy, Shirley MacLaine); and it was the first musical I ever learned by heart. Still, it seems to me that the Roundabout's revival (deftly directed and choreographed by Kathleen Marshall, at the American Airlines) outshines the original in both its production values and its male lead, Harry Connick, Jr. This is also some kind of first.

Here, the curtain rises on the gorgeous hubbub of Derek McLane's set. Huge pink and orange buttons decorate the proscenium arch. Like a comic simulacrum of Jean Tinguely's absurdist "Rotozaza," revolving wheels send a steady stream of red-and-white striped pajama tops through the air above the stage. The factory girls below, wittily costumed by Martin Pakledinaz, lean over their sewing machines, pushing plaid and polka-dot fabrics past humming needles while singing their mantra of mildly alienated labor: "Hurry up, hurry up / Can't waste time, can't waste time / When you're racing with the clock . . . / And the second hand doesn't understand / That your back may break and your fingers ache."

"The Pajama Game" is set in the mid-fifties, a time when Americans were enjoying a postwar boom in productivity and one of the greatest per-capita rises in wealth in the history of Western civilization. The opening number, nonetheless, establishes the workers' plaint: they want a seven-and-a-half-cent raise, and they may have to strike in order to get it. In the original Broadway production (and in the movie), John Raitt played Sid Sorokin, the factory's ambitious new supervisor, who takes on the head of the Grievance Committee, Babe Williams. Raitt was the quintessential Broadway leading man of the period; he had a barrel chest and a bowwow baritone. Onstage, he was foursquare and as clean as a whistle, and he struck a slightly humorless heroic pose. By contrast, there's something louche and loosey-goosey about Harry Connick, Jr., who is making his Broadway début in the role. He's gangly and a little furtive; his almond eyes seem to be hiding something, which only adds to his mischievous appeal. Connick is not what Broadway deems conventionally handsome. He has no beefcake swagger; he doesn't force himself on the audience. He has, instead, the confidence of talent—and the sex appeal that comes with it. Here, when boy meets girl there is credible chemistry.



When Harry Connick, Jr., meets Kelli O'Hara, there is credible chemistry.

ROBERT RISKO

Connick's real prowess, of course, is as a musician and song stylist—he has sold more than twenty million records since his first album was released, in 1987. His voice is particularly well suited to Adler and Ross's clever score, which boasts at least a half-dozen bona-fide hits. (In the mid-fifties, Broadway was still the purveyor of many of America's most memorable popular songs.) Raitt's voice came from operetta; Connick's is all jazz—slangy, smooth, and playful—which fits the colloquial verve of the lyrics. His best acting is done in song. "Hey There," for instance, begins with Sorokin dictating a memo to himself about his attraction to Babe (the excellent Kelli O'Hara), then, as he plays back and responds to his own recorded voice, the song turns from a bittersweet soliloquy to a tortured duet:

Machine: Better forget her
Sid: Forget her
Machine: Her with her nose in the air
Sid: Her with her nose in the air
Machine: She has you dancin' on a string
Sid: A puppet on a string
Machine: Break it and she won't care
Sid: She won't care for me

Whatever their industrial disputes, there's no disputing that Babe cares for Sorokin. In "There Once Was a Man," a sort of Frankie Laine Western pastiche, Connick and O'Hara, who has an ingénue's sweet face and a svelte body that tells a different story, make sparks fly off the lusty paean to love ("It rocks muh whole solar plexus. It's bigger than Texas"). In another scene, Sorokin puts his charisma to work on the boss's bookkeeper, a gargoyle named Gladys (Megan Lawrence), in order to get a look at the accounts. Pinning the drunken and susceptible Gladys against an orange baby grand, Sorokin expresses his desires by hitting a few deep chords, which she answers faintly at the other end of the keyboard. At one point, Gladys finds herself on her knees behind Sorokin and thrusts her hands between his legs to continue the duet. It's a terrific gag, which the production then brilliantly tops. Connick—a virtuoso at the keyboard—launches into a thrilling stride-piano version of "Hernando's Hideaway," in what is one of the few genuinely showstopping musical moments in recent years.

The show's fizz and flow never falter; the book has been efficiently souped up by Peter Ackerman, who has put into bold relief the cunning placement of the songs. I would have appreciated a little less mugging from Lawrence and a little more tartness from the charming Michael McKean, as Hines. Nonetheless, even in its last beat "The Pajama Game" manages to be breathtaking. When Babe and Sorokin come downstage—"Married life is lots of fun / Two can sleep as cheap as one," they sing—she's wearing only a pajama top decorated with red hearts, and he's barechested, in matching pajama bottoms. At the sight of Connick's bronzed pecs, my sophisticated date blurted out, "Oh . . . my . . . *God!*" She was not alone.

"The Pajama Game" is a hymn to American abundance. When the strikers tally up what their small raise will buy them over the next five years, one of them sings, "That's enough for me to get / An automatic washing machine / A year's supply of gasoline / Carpeting for the living room / A vacuum instead of the blasted broom." Fifty years on, the culture has mutated from a sense of boom to a sense of doom. In Will Power's "The Seven," a hip-hop adaptation of Aeschylus' "Seven Against Thebes" (developed and crisply directed by Jo Bonney, at the New York Theatre Workshop), malaise comes in the shape of Oedipus' curse. "O Lord this curse is thick / Like syrup / Big like a 'Bama girl / Wide as the whole world / Old as the sun when it make ya blind," says a gold-chained and velvet-suited Oedipus (the swinging Edwin Lee Gibson). The chorus answers, "Lord why did you curse us / All / Slaves in the field / Kings with crowns / Everybody's / Going down."

For those paying customers who don't know a gangsta from a wanksta, the production provides a four-page glossary explaining the hip-hop hell into which they are about to descend. The story is a tale spun by a d.j. (the perky Amber Efé). The cursed sons of Oedipus—Eteocles (Manuel Herrera) and Polynices (Jamyl Dobson)—cut a deal to share power over Thebes. They quarrel. They fight. They die. The funky Fates and the doo-wop chorus are organized into a series of clever tableaux by Bill T. Jones, whose arresting semaphores don't entirely dispel the essentially undramatic nature of hip-hop as theatre: it's all tell and no show. In most musicals these days, to show brilliance you have to have shadow. The problem with a hip-hop musical is the reverse: in order to show shadow, you have to have brilliance. "The Seven" never quite achieves sufficient verbal or visual lustre. Still, Power's intelligence and his wordplay are disarming. At the finale, the d.j. spins the story. "When are we gonna flip the record?" she asks in a winning envoi. "Remix it / Turn a problem to an opportunity / Paint ugly till we see beauty." ♦

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UNDER SIEGE

A beloved Soviet writer's path to dissent.

BY KEITH GESSEN

In the terrible winter of 1938, just before the last of the Moscow show trials, the Soviet secret police arrested a woman named Olga Guber for having failed to denounce her anti-Soviet husband. It was an error. The husband she was to have denounced—the poet Boris Guber, arrested a year earlier—was no longer her husband. The novelist Vasily Grossman was her husband. Desperate, Grossman sent a carefully composed letter to Nikolai Yezhov, the head of the N.K.V.D. He wrote that Olga had severed all ties with Guber long before. This was not really true. Then he wrote, "I obtained a diploma from a Soviet high school, received my degree in chemistry from Moscow State University in 1929, and worked as a senior research scientist . . . in the Donbass. I have been a full-time writer since 1934. . . . All that I possess—my education, my success as a writer, the high privilege of sharing my thoughts and feelings with Soviet readers—I owe to the Soviet government." That part was true; or, at least, Grossman meant it. He basically meant it.

Grossman went on to write "Life and Fate" and "Forever Flowing," novels that in their warmth of feeling and their historical sweep stand alongside "The Gulag Archipelago" as the most anti-Soviet books of all time. Yet here is this letter, which the American scholars John and Carol Garrard dug up and published in their 1996 biography of Grossman. Was it pro-Soviet? Consider that Grossman was born in 1905 in Berdichev, a large town in the Pale of Settlement. When he was twelve years old, the Revolution wiped out residence restrictions for Jews, allowed them equal entry into élite universities, and even took a great many of them into the secret police. Furthermore, by the time he wrote to the N.K.V.D. Grossman had gone from being a penniless chemistry student to being an established writer, with two published novels and, courtesy of the Soviet Writers' Union, an apartment in the center of Moscow. He had cause to be grateful.

He also had nowhere else to go. He knew French, but he wasn't of the Russian generation that corresponded with Rilke and sat for Picasso. He had no reason to be nostalgic for the Tsar's Russia, obviously. So he was making the best of things. His literary career began, as he told Yezhov, in 1934, with the publication of the story "In the Town of Berdichev." It was about a hard-as-nails Bolshevik commissar who, having become pregnant during the civil war, is bivouacked with the Magazaniks, a poor Jewish family in Berdichev, while she gives birth. As Polish forces approach Berdichev, she decides that she will stay with her little Alyosha rather than retreat with her regiment. But at the last minute she sees a group of workers marching, suicidally, in the Poles' direction, and she remembers Red Square a few years earlier, and hearing Lenin speak, and being indescribably moved. She runs out of the house and follows the workers to their deaths; the Jewish family will raise her child. Watching her, the old worker Magazanik says to his wife, "There used to be people like that in the Bund. Those are real people, Beyla. Whereas us? We're not people. We're shit." His wife tells him to be quiet and heat some milk for the child.

The details of the story save it from sentimentality; or, rather, the sentimentality is distributed evenly, between the touching Jewish family and the dream of world revolution, so that there's an honesty to the setup. The commissar really thinks she's going to stay with her child, and maybe she should. And maybe she shouldn't.

"In the Town of Berdichev" was greeted with genuine enthusiasm. The fashionable novelist Ilya Ehrenburg, then in Paris, thought Grossman's work reminiscent of Babel, and Babel himself was charmed by the story. Even Mikhail Bulgakov, unflappably haughty toward all things Soviet, seemed to like it. "Excuse me," he said, "do you mean to say that something worthwhile can still be published?" That year, Russian literature entered the darkest period in its history. It must have looked as if Grossman had found a solution to the problem of socialist realism—by combining a realist method with an unintrusive sympathy for the revolutionary movement—and he continued to pursue this in stories and, most notably, in his novel "Stepan Kolchugin," about a coal miner turned revolutionary. It wasn't that he was a believer—a cousin had been arrested in 1933, and Grossman never joined the Party—but he understood and respected the faith of the believers. Later on, as a famous war correspondent, Grossman asked his editor to "give refuge" to his friend Andrei Platonov, the strange, great novelist. "He is defenseless and unsettled," Grossman wrote. Grossman, by contrast, was not unsettled: he understood the rules and he was going to play by them.

In 1938, the henchmen of the Lubyanka were not unresponsive to Grossman's request; this was part of their charm. If they accused you of being a British spy, and you told them you weren't, they would beat and torture you until you changed your mind. Otherwise, they shot you, as they shot Guber. But if you caught them on a technicality—the husband you were supposed to have denounced was no longer your husband—they might just let you go, with their apologies. Olga was released. She had spent six months in prison.

Then, in 1941, the war came. Like many others, Grossman rushed to volunteer for the front as the Germans overran Belarus and Ukraine (including Berdichev, where his mother still resided). He did not at first volunteer as a writer: he wanted to kill Nazis. Being overweight, nearsighted, and in poor health, he was rejected. He spent the next several weeks trying to think of something to do, and ended up at the editorial offices of *Krasnaya Zvezda*, the Army newspaper.

A new book of Grossman's war writings—a collection taken from his notebooks and his published pieces—has just appeared in English as "A Writer at

War" (Pantheon; $27.50), translated by Antony Beevor and Luba Vinogradova. Beevor, whose book "Stalingrad" is the definitive account of the fighting in that city and relies heavily for color on Grossman's reportage, is very fond of Grossman, and this collection weaves together his texts alongside lucid historical commentary to tell the story of the war through Grossman's eyes. But what about Grossman himself? One wants to read the notebooks as a novel of education, recording a growing consciousness of the brutality and the corruption of the Soviet regime. In fact, a bit disappointingly, the Grossman we meet at the beginning of the book is already skeptical and wary of the regime. He notes the propaganda in the papers. "The bedraggled enemy continues his cowardly advance," goes the headline, as the Germans take town after town. Interrogations of occasional German prisoners (at this point it was mostly Red Army soldiers who were being taken prisoner, in the hundreds of thousands) are absurd and demoralizing, a pathetic kind of Soviet tourism. Grossman writes of a Wehrmacht motorcyclist being questioned at night:

> He is Austrian, tall, good-looking. Everyone admires his long, soft, steel-colored leather coat. Everyone is touching it, shaking their heads. This means: how on earth can one fight people who wear such a coat? . . . The interpreter is a Jew, barely literate. He is speaking in Yiddish.

Stalin was a magician, in his way, but one could not simply announce that the German armies weren't there or order them shot in the basement of Lubyanka. Or, rather, one *could* order them shot, that was just the thing to order, but they kept shooting back. When Grossman returned to Moscow from his trip to the front, his car dented by shrapnel after he had barely escaped the German capture of Orel, his editor immediately demanded to know why he hadn't described the "heroic defense of Orel." Grossman answered that there had been no defense of Orel, heroic or otherwise. He was ordered back to the front.

Halted outside Moscow in December, the Germans resumed their offensive in the south as soon as the snow melted. The Red Army reeled again until it reached the very edge of European Russia, at a large industrial city on the Volga that in 1925 had been renamed Stalingrad.

When Grossman arrived, the city had already been laid waste by the same Luftwaffe commander who, during the Spanish Civil War, had bombed Guernica. "Stalingrad is burned down," Grossman wrote, and he went on:

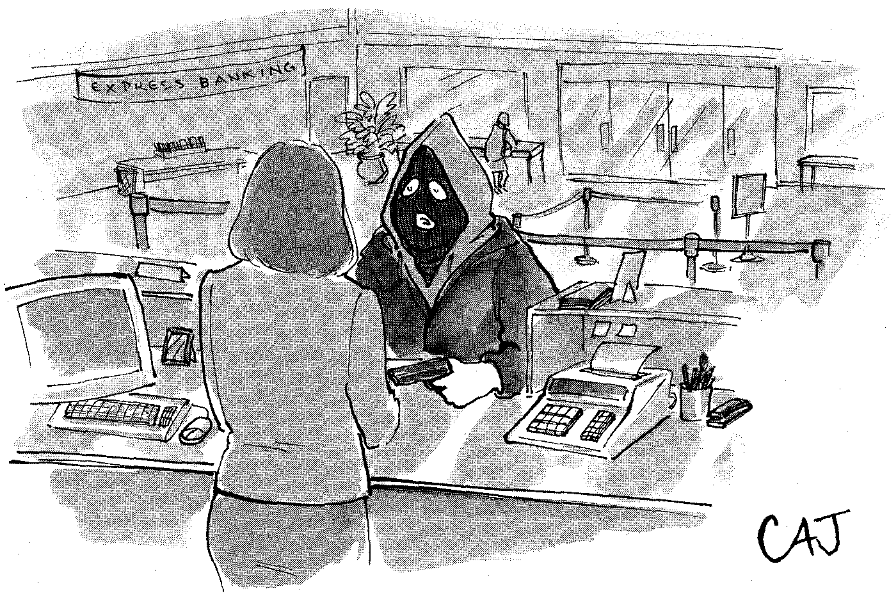
COURTESY EKATERINA VASILIEVNA KOROTKOVA-GROSSMAN

Vasily Grossman in Schwerin, Germany, in 1945, as it was sacked by the Red Army.

> I would have to write too much if I wanted to describe it. Stalingrad is burned down. Stalingrad is in ashes. It is dead. People are in basements. Everything is burned out. The hot walls of the buildings are like the bodies of people who have died in the terrible heat and haven't gone cold yet. . . . There are children wandering about, there are many laughing faces. Many people are half insane.

Grossman spent the next five months in the city, crossing between the east and west banks, and earning the trust of the soldiers who were fending off the Germans in brutal house-to-house fighting. He formed a deep attachment to the men; Beevor (who knows so much about Stalingrad that when Grossman mentions some fish we get a footnote giving the species) describes Grossman as experiencing a period of "spiritual idealization," believing that the defenders of Stalingrad were saints. The men, in turn, seeing themselves described in Grossman's articles in *Krasnaya Zvezda*, became attached to him. "Your parental heart would have rejoiced if you could see how I was welcomed by the Red Army," Grossman wrote to his father. Only Ehrenburg, whose *Krasnaya Zvezda* articles were floridly bloodthirsty, and earned him the particular ire of Goebbels, was more famous in Russia as a war correspondent than the understated, hard-nosed Grossman.

In Stalingrad, Grossman spent time with Vasily Zaitsev, the sniper whose duel with a German counterpart was inflated into a multi-day affair by Soviet propaganda (and then inflated once more by Hollywood, which, in "Enemy at the Gates," stretched the contest to weeks and added a sex scene with Rachel Weisz), but one of his longest articles was an interview with another sniper, named Chekhov. The name must have appealed to Grossman. To lie in wait, patiently observing, watching, breathing, and then, as soon as the man reveals his position,



"Throw in one of those brochures about refinancing my home."

• •

shooting him in the head: it's not exactly what a writer does, but it's not so dissimilar. Stalingrad was about life and death, for Grossman, but it was also, necessarily, about writing. It seems to have altered his idea about truth. "It is only here that people know what a kilometre is," he declared. "A kilometre is one thousand metres. It is one hundred thousand centimetres." Maxim Gorky had defined socialist realism as "the ability to see the present in terms of the future." But what did a centimetre look like from the future?

After the Germans were encircled at Stalingrad, in the winter of 1943, Grossman and the Red Army began to move west, and as they saw what the Germans had done the mood of this book noticeably darkens. "Death of ninety-three Jewish families," Grossman notes in the city of Elista. "They'd smeared the children's lips with poison." He hears about the murder of the Jews of Odessa, Babel's home town. "Yesterday I was in Kiev," he writes to Olga. He had attended high school there. "I visited the addresses of relatives and acquaintances. There are only graves and death." That fall, he summed up what he had seen in an article that *Krasnaya Zvezda* refused to run. "There are no Jews in the Ukraine," he wrote. "All is silence. Everything is still. A whole people has been brutally murdered." Then he reached Berdichev, where his mother had taught French, and where she and Grossman had lived with his uncle David, a doctor, after she and Vasily's father separated. Now he learned what had happened after the Germans took the town, two and a half years earlier: in the course of two September days, Berdichev's entire Jewish population—thirty thousand people—was murdered in a clearing outside the town. Grossman's mother was among the victims. And there was more. In the summer of 1944, Grossman and the Red Army entered Poland. In July, just outside of Lublin, they discovered Majdanek and, northeast of Warsaw, Treblinka.

The Soviets have often been reproached for suppressing what they knew about the Holocaust. It's true that the widely publicized report on Majdanek was assigned not to Grossman but, instead, to the Party-line Konstantin Simonov, who ignored the special status of the Jews in the Nazi organization of death. It's also true that the Soviets kept quiet about Auschwitz when they discovered the camp (and painstakingly documented everything they found), the following January. And when, after the war, Grossman and Ehrenburg gathered an enormous collection of materials and testimonies about the murder of the Soviet Jews into a massive "Black Book," the result of their labors was suppressed. But Grossman was allowed to publish a twelve-thousand-word article on Treblinka in the major monthly journal *Znamya*, in November of 1944, when nothing of comparable scope and authority had appeared anywhere, in any language. The article, which was subsequently read at Nuremberg, is a masterly work of reconstruction. Grossman gathered the information from some of the local farmers and a handful of survivors who had fled to the woods. Other than that, Treblinka was gone: it had been razed months before. As in Ukraine, there was nothing left for Grossman to find—"only graves and death," as he had written. The Jews had all been killed.

Early in the notebooks, you sense the extent to which Grossman had imbibed the spirit of Soviet internationalism. Babel, travelling through the same areas during the civil war, had been deeply moved by the traces he saw of Jewish culture; Grossman barely seems to notice. But after he returned through Ukraine, and especially after Warsaw, it was as if he had been seized with the need to list all the Jews he saw. "A cellar with Jews," he writes. "Jews who have emerged from under the ground." "Story about the encounter of two Jews from Lodz, in the darkness of a boiler room." Finally, they reach Berlin: "Thousands of encounters. Thousands of Berliners in the streets. . . . An old man, a Jew, who burst into tears when he learned about the fate of those who went to Lublin."

After the war, Grossman began work on an epic novel about Stalingrad. "For a Just Cause," the result, was a superior sort of socialist realism. There are a lot of "historical" scenes (Stalin, Hitler, meetings of the local Communist Party) and descriptions of battles, but the characters at least seem like human beings; we don't get colonels who resemble "a young Gorky." Not everyone liked the novel when it was published, in 1952; Pasternak was so disappointed that when he had a heart attack not long after reading it he blamed Grossman. But it was hailed in the press as a Tolstoyan achievement.

Then it was unhailed—in part because it underestimated the work of the Party in the victory, in part because Stalin, as he accelerated his campaign against "cosmopolitanism," had other plans for the Jews than that they become Soviet Tolstoys. Grossman was viciously attacked in *Pravda*, and Alexander Tvardovsky, the editor of *Novy Mir*, had to apologize publicly for serializing the novel. As the attacks continued, and Stalin made public his fantastic Kremlin Doctors' Plot, Grossman was asked to attend an urgent meeting of leading Jewish cultural figures. On the way there, he dropped in on Tvardovsky to tell him what he thought of him. "Go to your meeting," Tvardovsky finally exploded. "You still don't understand how it is. They'll explain it for you." At the meeting, Grossman was cajoled into lending his name to a dismal letter condemning the Jewish doctors supposedly involved in the plot, and begging for Stalin's mercy. Eventually, although it was wintertime, Grossman and his friend the poet and translator Semyon Lipkin retreated to a dacha outside Moscow. Then Stalin died, and, as Grossman later wrote, "the ice of the Arctic Ocean was broken, and the ocean howled."

But Stalin's death alone cannot account for the artistic leap from "For a Just Cause" to its sequel, "Life and Fate." The two books share many of the same characters, and they both center on Stalingrad, and probably a computer analysis would prove that the same author wrote both books—but the computer would be wrong. "Life and Fate," which will be reissued this spring by N.Y.R.B. Classics, in Robert Chandler's fine translation, is a work of an entirely different order. Like "War and Peace," it is structured around a single extended family, in this case the Shaposhnikovs. There is the same large canvas, the same method of depicting the life of the entire country through the lives of some intertwined, interrelated, but far-flung characters, the same occasional philosophical digressions. The heavy breathing of the generals who saved Stalingrad and their melancholy feelings ("Neither of the two men quite understood why their meeting had been so unsatisfactory; that the main thing about it was not the practical part, but what they had both been unable to say") resemble the heavy breathing and quiet philosophizing of Kutuzov, the savior of Borodino. There is the same powerful human warmth that notices everything about the characters, knows everything about them, so that you feel them living on in the world of the book even while you're not watching.

The novel begins with a description of the fighting at Stalingrad, still in the martial, residually Soviet tone of Grossman's newspaper days. But then gradually the author seems to lose interest in the battles and the generals. There is a remarkable chapter about a woman who cannot get a residence permit in the city to which she has been evacuated. There is a chapter about a woman named Lyudmila Shtrum (née Shaposhnikova), who is jostled on the tram on her way to visit her wounded son in the hospital. That is all; and her son dies. The depiction of the Shtrum family itself, always quarrelling, then suddenly making up—strangers, yet living in the same house and bound by deep blood ties—doesn't feel Soviet at all. It feels like Chekhov, or even Bellow. All the characters experience their dilemmas physically—their lives are filled by them, or emptied. Years of life under Communism have eroded people's personalities; where the commissar in Grossman's first short story was equally convincing as a mother and as a commissar, the people in "Life and Fate" waver between false positions. This is how a totalitarian system can get its subjects to police themselves. "There were cases of huge queues being formed by people awaiting execution," Grossman writes in "Life and Fate," of the German concentration camps, "and it was the victims themselves who regulated the movement of these queues." One simply no longer knows who one is. The brilliant physicist Viktor Shtrum, Grossman's alter ego, is asked by his institute's personnel department to fill out an epic questionnaire. Question No. 29 is "Have you or your closest relatives ever been the subject of a judicial inquiry or trial?" At home, unthreatened, Shtrum still breaks down:

> He was seized by a feeling of irreparable guilt and impurity. He remembered a meeting at which a Party member, confessing his faults, had said: "Comrades, I'm not one of us."
>
> Suddenly Viktor rebelled. No, I'm not one of the obedient and submissive. I'm all on my own, my wife is no longer interested in me, but so what? I won't renounce these unfortunates who died for no reason.
>
> You should be ashamed of yourselves, comrades! How can you bring up such things? *These people are innocent—what can their wives and children be guilty of? It's you who should repent, you who should be begging for forgiveness. And you want to prove my inferiority, to destroy my credibility—simply because I'm related to these innocent victims? All I'm guilty of is failing to help them.*
>
> At the same time, another, quite opposite train of thought was running through Viktor's mind . . . I didn't keep in touch with them, I never corresponded with enemies of the Party, I never received letters from camps, I never gave them material help, I met them only infrequently and by chance . . .

A critic once complained that Grossman's characters are poorly drawn, just "names with problems." In fact, they seem to be problems with bodies, their sufferings never merely verbal and never quite possible to explain. The heroes of this novel are weak, confused, misled people—and, whether they are old revolutionaries who commit crimes in the name of the Party or non-Party men who momentarily bow to its tremendous pressure, Grossman examines them with a remarkable lack of rancor. Solzhenitsyn thought the old revolutionaries were despicable criminals; Grossman prefers to say that, for the most part, they were terribly, tragically mistaken, and most of them paid for it with their lives.

Grossman often gets carried away. One subversive conversation after another is reproduced, insights are had, and facts are noticed; and little of this serves the development of the plot. It is as if he had found a truth machine and needed to put everything in the Soviet Union through it. This will take a while. But to watch Grossman as he does this—as he discovers how deep he can go into a person's character, his psychology, merely by looking at him in his most immediate social relations, among his family and his friends—is to watch a man become free.

"Life and Fate" was finished in 1960. Two years later, Grossman was forced to compose another letter, this one to Nikita Khrushchev:

> In October 1960 I submitted the manuscript of my novel "Life and Fate" to the editors of the journal *Znamya*. At approximately the same time A. T. Tvardovsky, chief editor of the journal *Novy Mir*, also received a copy.
>
> In the middle of February 1961 officers of the KGB presented me with a search warrant and seized from my home various copies and rough drafts of the manuscript of "Life and Fate." Simultaneously, copies of the manuscript were seized at *Znamya* and *Novy Mir*.

The K.G.B. officers were careful people; when they asked Grossman who else had the manuscript, and he told them the typist did, they asked him to go along with them to the typist's, in case they got lost. Then they took him home.

What Grossman didn't mention was that he had shown the manuscript to his friend Semyon Lipkin, wondering what Lipkin would cut to make it publishable. Lipkin read the thousand-page manuscript in awe. He thought the book was a revelation—and that, no matter what Grossman did, it could never be published. As Lipkin recalled the scene in his memoir, Grossman became angry and denounced him as a coward. They argued. Then Lipkin told Grossman that his punctuation was inconsistent, and Grossman almost threw him out. But Lipkin kept a copy of the manuscript.

Grossman's letter to Khrushchev lacks the concision and conviction of the letter to Yezhov. It appeals, cleverly, to Khrushchev's speeches about Leninist democracy, but the writer has lost the thread of things: he no longer follows the logic of the leadership, he meanders, and he seems distraught. "There is no sense, no truth, in the present situation, whereby I am physically free, but my book, to which I have given my life, remains in jail," he wrote. "I ask you to release my book." The sensible thing, Khrushchev no doubt thought as he read this, would be to arrest both man and book.

But these were different times. Although Grossman's request was not granted, he was given an audience with Mikhail Suslov, Khrushchev's powerful cultural-affairs minister. Grossman recorded Suslov's comments as soon as he got home, and they make for curious reading. Suslov told him that he hadn't read the book but had carefully attended to the internal appraisals that the manuscript had received. And Suslov, sharper on this point than Grossman, considered it a dangerous book: "Why should we add your book to the atomic bombs that our enemies are preparing to launch against us? . . . Why should we publish your book and begin a public discussion as to whether anyone needs the Soviet Union or not?" Suslov said how much he liked Grossman's old novels; why couldn't he write more of those?

Grossman's last years were unhappy, lonely, and bitter. He didn't even know how to go about sending a manuscript abroad. Pasternak, who would have known, had died in 1960, after a nasty campaign against him in the Soviet press. Grossman read Solzhenitsyn's "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" in manuscript and was ecstatic—at the achievement of the novella, and perhaps because this might mean that his own work would stand a better chance. But "Ivan Denisovich" described only the camps, whereas Grossman's novel encompassed all of Soviet society. Touchingly, Grossman expected Solzhenitsyn to come and see him. The younger man had heard of Grossman's book, and he had reached the same place as Grossman intellectually, but he had done so through the camps; by the time he began writing, he was implacably opposed to the Soviet regime. And perhaps there was some contempt for the accommodations that the older writer had made. Solzhenitsyn did not come by.

Life at home was miserable: Grossman was now debilitated by cancer, and got on poorly with his wife and his grown stepson, Fyodor. Olga thought that he should write screenplays, and when he was in the hospital she got rid of his dog. (Grossman, admittedly, had been conducting an affair.) Meanwhile, the people who watched such things continued to watch Grossman. On October 25, 1962, at the height of the Cuban missile crisis, the Central Committee heard a report from one of its stooges at the Writers' Union: not only was Grossman unrepentant; he would, when prodded, become "very angry and express hostile views on Soviet society." The next day, the committee learned that Grossman was at work on another "anti-Soviet" novel. Grossman's American biographers, the Garrards, suggest that it was Fyodor who betrayed the contents of the book.

"Forever Flowing," much shorter than "Life and Fate," serves as its coda. Everything inessential has been stripped away. The novella tells the story of a man, Ivan Grigoryevich, who returns from decades in the camps and cannot find a place for himself in the new U.S.S.R. Some of his friends have died, others have got married, and his cousin has become a wealthy Soviet man. While he suffered, life went on. Ivan Grigoryevich cannot understand this. He visits the Hermitage and looks at the paintings, but they leave him "cold and indifferent":

> It was unbearable to think that those paintings had remained as beautiful as ever during the years in camp which had transformed him into a prematurely old man. Why hadn't the faces of the madonnas grown old too, and why hadn't their eyes been blinded with tears?

As Grossman, sick and despairing, was writing this, a new generation gathered at the Polytechnic Institute, listening to poetry and sighing over the dreamy young Yevtushenko. They wore the convictions that had cost Grossman his friends and his career the way they wore the latest Polish jackets. And when the time came for them to sign their letters and join the great Soviet bourgeoisie, they mostly did.

An evil regime can make its opponents ridiculous by making them shrill. After being excluded from the university in "Life and Fate," Viktor Shtrum briefly turns into a Soviet Noam Chomsky: "One day Viktor counted eighty-six mentions of Stalin's name in one issue of *Pravda;* the following day he counted eighteen mentions in one editorial." Grossman himself seems to have become like this socially; those who weren't close friends recalled, toward the end of his life, a very irritable man. But his writing became only more lucid and more direct. In this last book, Grossman, like a man making up for lost time, described with a clear mind and heart the horrors that, for twenty years as a writer, he had not quite mentioned: collectivization, the famine, the camps. The freedom to say whatever he pleased, unconcerned with the censor, apparently liberated him, too, from his fealty to conventional narrative: two-thirds of the way through the book, we are treated to a very intelligent forty-page essay explaining why Stalin was the heir to Lenin. The last thread of loyalty—the romantic cult of Lenin—is snapped.

In the end, Grossman, who during and after the war had been so popular, so in touch with his readers, was as isolated and discouraged as any writer in Russian history. "Forever Flowing" was published in Germany in 1970; the manuscript of "Life and Fate" sat at Lipkin's dacha for years before Lipkin finally got up the courage to send it abroad, and it wasn't published in Russia until 1988. Before that, it was just a rumor. Grossman, who died in 1964, never saw any of this. All he knew was that he had lost his Soviet home, and had not found another. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Culture and Society

Us and Them, *by David Berreby (Little, Brown; $26.95).* Berreby's aim is to demonstrate how greatly what he calls our "tribal" nature—the tendency to judge others according to categories, such as Muslims, lawyers, whites—governs our lives. Drawing on such diverse disciplines as psychology, genetics, and social neuroscience, he demonstrates both the frequent instability of such categories—for instance, the idea of Type A and Type B personalities, once influential in psychology, has been discredited—and their power. Berreby's thesis is often clouded by a superabundance of examples, but it is nonetheless a stimulating tour of a fascinating topic. He is particularly trenchant on the subject of race, a category more or less abandoned by geneticists but inexorable at a social level. He notes, "Racial and ethnic groups are real the way money is real—because people believe they are and act on their beliefs."

Cosmopolitanism, *by Kwame Anthony Appiah (Norton; $23.95).* Appiah, a Princeton philosophy professor, articulates a precise yet flexible ethical manifesto for a world characterized by heretofore unthinkable interconnection but riven by escalating fractiousness. Drawing on his Ghanaian roots and on examples from philosophy and literature, he attempts to steer a course between the extremes of liberal universalism, with its tendency to impose our values on others, and cultural relativism, with its implicit conviction that gulfs in understanding cannot be bridged. Cosmopolitanism, in Appiah's formulation, balances our "obligations to others" with the "value not just of human life but of particular human lives"—what he calls "universality plus difference." Appiah remains skeptical of simple maxims for ethical behavior—like the Golden Rule, whose failings as a moral precept he swiftly demonstrates—and argues that cosmopolitanism is the name not "of the solution but of the challenge."

Covering, *by Kenji Yoshino (Random House; $24.95).* Yoshino's memoir-cum-treatise combines a provocative examination of the current state of civil rights with an account of his experiences as a gay Japanese-American. Arguing that discrimination now targets "the subset of the group that fails to assimilate to mainstream norms," Yoshino describes a phenomenon that he calls "covering": the pressure exerted on racial minorities to "act white," the social acceptance offered to gays as long as they don't "flaunt" their identities, the ways women in the workplace are expected to camouflage their lives as mothers. Exploring the history of civil-rights litigation in the United States, Yoshino concludes that courts have too often focussed on individuals' capacity to assimilate, rather than on the legitimacy of the demand that they do so.

Gentle Regrets, *by Roger Scruton (Continuum; $28.95).* Scruton is an English philosopher best known for vigorously defending traditional culture in works like "England: An Elegy" and "The Meaning of Conservatism." His latest book assembles twelve "autobiographical excursions" into a composite account of his intellectual development. In addition to neatly expository essays ("How I Discovered Culture") and a sequence of poems entitled "Miss Hap," the collection includes a reminiscence of the "sleeping cities" of the Eastern bloc and an acute meditation on beauty and religious faith. The blunt wit for which Scruton is known is scarce here, but lyric suits him almost as well as polemic. Such passages as the evocation of a chapel filled with the "soft smell of stone that has grown old in shadow" vividly illuminate the moral import of aesthetic values.

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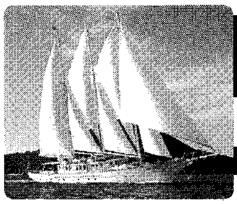

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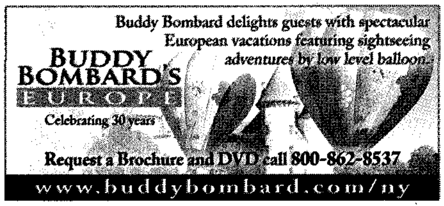

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ON TELEVISION

MEDAL MANIA

Going for the gold in the Italian Alps.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

On February 11th, the first day of competition in the Winter Olympics in Turin, snow in the Eastern United States competed in the accumulation event, winning a gold medal the next day in a number of places, including New York City, where 26.9 inches covered the ground. Americans divided themselves into two groups: the doers and the watchers, one group out there shovelling and sledding, the other remaining happily inside in fuzzy slippers, secure in the knowledge that nothing would be required of them all day. Thousands of miles away, as the couch-sitters looked on, Olympic hardware was already being distributed, with the speed skater Chad Hedrick taking a first in the men's five-thousand-metre event, and nabbing the first gold for the Stati Uniti d'America. Hedrick was one of a number of athletes singled out in the early days of NBC's coverage of the Games—which extended to CNBC, MSNBC, and the USA Network—and, of course, in the four-hour telecast of the opening ceremonies, as the athletes paraded into the Olympic Stadium. It was during these ceremonies that the stage was set for the drama to come, by the announcers Bob Costas and Brian Williams: How would the figure skater Michelle Kwan do here, at what would be her last Olympics, her last chance to add a gold medal to the silver and bronze that she'd won in the two previous Games? The new, stringent judging rules for skating, instituted after the flaws in the old, highly subjective system led to what many held to be a criminal outcome in the pairs skating in Salt Lake City, four years ago—how would they affect the competition? Would Hedrick's braggadocio in claiming that he could win five gold medals, tying the record that Eric Heiden set in 1980, pay off? Bode Miller, the ballyhooed bad boy of the ski team, who had recently admitted to competing with a hangover—would he deliver in his five downhill events?

All of these questions and more could be contemplated during the tackily retro opening pageant: athletes marched in to the accompaniment of such well-known Italian standards as "Hot Stuff," "I Will Survive," and "Y.M.C.A." The theme of the Winter Olympics was "Passion lives here," a rather flat and unconvincing declaration—perhaps the International Olympic Committee should have chosen "Disco lives here" instead. In every multimillion-dollar extravaganza, there are elements that fall under the category of It Seemed Like a Good Idea When We Started Planning, and for some viewers one of these was seeing Yoko Ono—whose name is pretty much the first thing that comes to mind when you think about sports—take the stage, in winter white and sunglasses, and deliver a message about world peace; Ono's own recent efforts in the service of better human relations include denigrating Paul McCartney's songwriting talent at an awards dinner last fall. It's always sweet to see the new faces on the American team in the opening ceremonies, even if they make you feel old. Old, and a little cranky: was it absolutely necessary for one of our young snowboarders to be talking on her cell phone while marching in the procession? Well, maybe it made a certain kind of sense, since, for many of the highly touted American athletes, the theme of the twentieth Winter Games turned out to be a meek "Can you hear me now?"

Ah, snowboarding—the beach volleyball of the Winter Olympics. For those who feel that snowboarding is too raggedy and disestablishmentarian, the halfpipe, the first of three snowboarding events, was not destined to win them over. If your criterion for including a sport in the Olympics is that it have some connection with the essence of the season in which it is played, the halfpipe—in which athletes crisscross down the length of a long half-tube and shoot up from its edges to do multiple turns and flips in the air—doesn't quite cut it. You find halfpipes in skateboarding—the activity that gave rise to snowboarding—but you don't find them in nature. Later on in the competition, the snowboard cross and the parallel giant slalom events may have calmed some of the oldsters down. These looked more like traditional sports: they involved going down a snowy hill, which *is* something that you find in nature. The snowboarders' uniforms—hugely baggy white pants and tops with incongruous Yankee pinstripes—weren't exactly snappy; the halfpipers, who were often in a crouch, looked like moving piles of clean laundry. Still, the athletes in this event seemed to be having a ball; their good spirits were always in evidence as they hugged each other and smiled for the TV cameras. Even naysayers couldn't be glad when the twenty-year-old Lindsey Jacobellis essentially threw away a gold medal in snowboard cross by stupidly making a showboat move in the air which caused her to fall shortly before crossing the finish line. Your brain froze while you watched it happen, and so did Jacobellis's face afterward; she couldn't believe it, either. She had all kinds of excuses, but she didn't behave badly, and even sat for an interview with Costas afterward. (Echoing Jay Leno's famous "Tonight Show" grilling of Hugh Grant after he was caught playing a year-round sport with a prostitute, Costas asked her, "What were you thinking?") It's hard to be harsh with some of these athletes, especially if you are now old enough to be their mother.

NBC slips on the ice in the race for prime-time ratings.

HAMPUS ERICSTAM

Young eyes—this is what snowboarding is all about for NBC, which gave the sport a large amount of prime-time coverage. Didn't work. Ratings for these winter exertions were down from the previous two, and "American Idol"—Fox piled on two episodes during the first week of the Games and three in the second week—beat the snowpants off NBC's broadcasts. Something does need to be said about a singing contest with dubious standards being more popular than the glorious athleticism on display in Turin—but it practically says itself. "American Idol" and the Olympics do have one thing in common: hideous getups. In this category, almost all the ice-dancing competitors won a gold medal, encrusted with cubic zirconia. The very nature of the skating outfits is problematic: when a male figure skater falls, he looks like a man who fell, period; the women, with all those butt-baring costumes, look like helpless schoolgirls, whose underpants are momentarily on display for the whole class to gawk at. It was nice to see the Russian Irina Slutskaya skating in a catsuit in the short program—it was attractive, and showed her form, but it didn't contain the tiniest potential for embarrassment.

It was a setback for NBC that Michelle Kwan dropped out of the competition before skating even began, and that the unshaven, uncharming Bode Miller performed so badly on the slopes. But the network still made a nice profit on the Games, helped along by ads for health foods like Coke and McDonald's fried-chicken sandwiches, and by dozens of ads for gas-guzzling S.U.V.s, the automotive shame of America, whose emissions do their part to melt the snow and ice that make the Winter Olympics possible. The Olympics are an opportunity for a network to promote its upcoming offerings, but this time around there wasn't much to brag about. There were a lot of ads for the mindless game show "Deal or No Deal," and for the latest installment of "The Apprentice." (One such ad followed a tribute to the great sportscaster Curt Gowdy, who died on the second Monday of the Games; in clips showing highlights of Gowdy's career, the contrast between his genuineness and Trump's blowhardiness was rather sharp.) Most of NBC's announcers were very good, though some of them came too close to the high end of the John Madden Decibel Scale. And I could have stood to see a hundred fewer replays of the American skier Lindsey Kildow's wipeout during a training run.

What? No mention of curling? No discussion of the Winter Olympics is complete unless it includes a few jokes at the expense of curling. But stay—let us for once leave curling alone. It will hold until 2010, when the Winter Games go to Vancouver. Four years from now, everything in the world will have changed: high-school seniors will be college seniors, endangered species will have died out, lovers will have come and gone, children will have been born, and George W. Bush will no longer be President. But curling will still be here, and it will still be funny. ♦

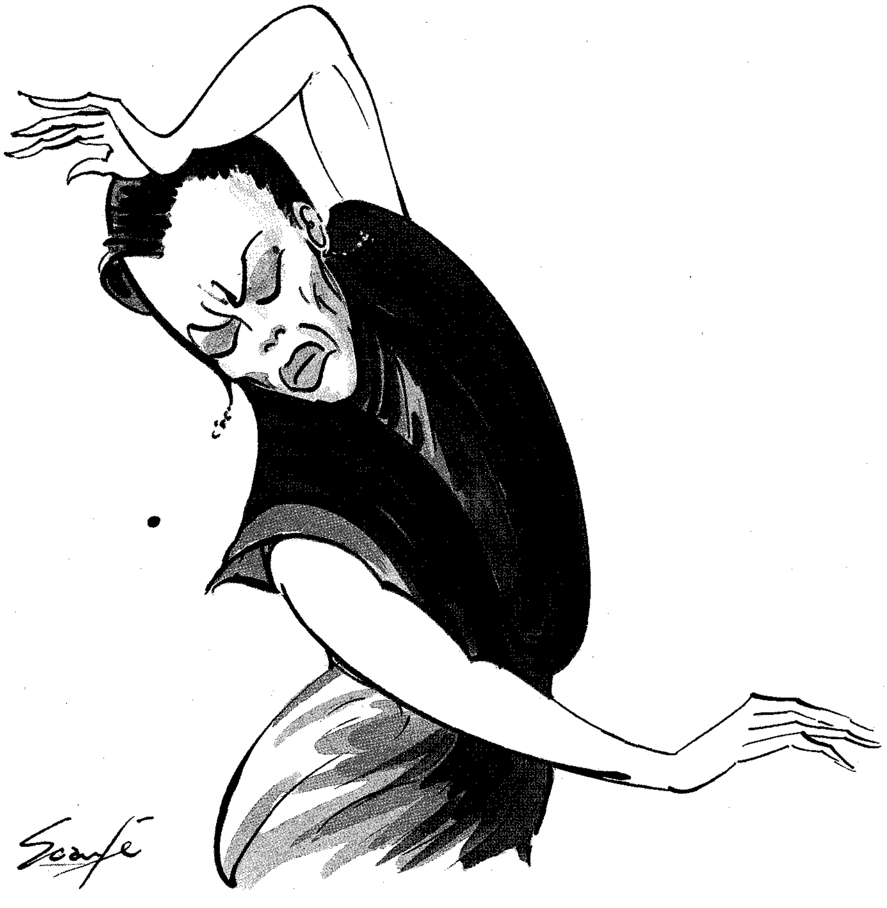
DANCING

MODERNISMO

Future flamenco.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

Of all the forms of ethnic dance that have made their way from the campsite to the concert stage, the most glamorous and the most beloved is surely flamenco. It is also the one with the longest history of going commercial. By the mid-nineteenth century, flamenco dancers, tired of plying their trade at parties or in bars—often for little more than free drinks—had moved into the music halls and the *cafés cantantes.* The purists scolded them for selling out. The *flamencos* thumbed their noses back. Finally, they were making a living. This is important to remember. What we think of as *flamenco puro*, the real thing, is a product of theatres, not of hootenannies.



Soledad Barrio performed the siguiriya, the most tragic of flamenco dances.

GERALD SCARFE

Even in the night clubs, however, flamenco was a limited business, a single dance—a *soleá*, an *alegrías*, anywhere from five to twenty minutes long—after which the dancer yielded the stage to the ballad singer or whomever, and maybe got to go on again later in the evening. Presumably, this restriction was built into the art. Flamenco is fundamentally a solo form, a structured improvisation. Each dance has a prescribed phrase length, rhythm, and mood. The dancer's job is to build something new on those fixed foundations. Flamenco is thus very much like the jazz solo: it is both traditional and personal, but, above all, distilled—brief and heroic, like a speech by someone in the Iliad who is about to die. It therefore does not allow for more expansive theatrical maneuvers—the creation of character, the spinning of narrative—the things that could turn it into a unified two-hour production.

Well, why couldn't it be changed? certain *flamencos* asked. Why couldn't we fit those other things in? Flash forward to the sixth annual New York Flamenco Festival, staged at City Center last month by the flamenco producer Miguel Marín and Robert Browning, the director of the World Music Institute. Here, as in former incarnations of the yearly festival, we saw a kind of jumble of flamenco's recent history. Some nights, we were given the "traditional" product—serious dancers, with Gypsy singers, doing the *soleá* and the *alegrías*—and, on other nights, the naïve, cheesy shows that some *flamencos* have put together in the hope of making full-scale theatre out of the form.

Worst things first: the Nuevo Ballet Español. Marín, in his curtain speech, described this company as representing "the new trend of flamenco." If so, we're in trouble. Most of the show consisted of group dances coming at us like panzer battalions. The idea of transferring flamenco from the soloist to the ensemble is clearly to make it more splashy, and thus to lift the requirement of thorny concentration that was once imposed on the dancer and the audience. But it doesn't work—or the choreographers haven't yet found a way to make it work. Last year, Francisco López, the director of Jerez's flamenco festival, made this point to the *Times:* "If a flamenco dancer is called in to choreograph for the National Ballet of Spain, he or she teaches the whole company one of his or her signature routines. Then the whole company copies it, and they'll do it all together. That's what they call choreographing"—in other words, no real design for the group, no real use of the stage space. And that's not to mention what is lost with the abandonment of the solo form: the personal commitment, the interchange between the dancer and the musicians. All we get is a big, moving blob of dance. And that is what we saw in Nuevo Ballet Español's ensembles. The directors of the company, perhaps feeling that something was missing, tried to compensate with flash. Five women charging downstage in red dresses, banging castanets: that'll get them, right? Wrong. It looked like bad Broadway. And though the show also included solos by, among others, the company's two directors, Ángel Rojas and Carlos Rodríguez, these acts were corrupted by the same jack-it-up philosophy that powered the ensemble sections. Both Rojas and Rodríguez—especially Rodríguez—are good technicians. (As in today's ballet, the decline of inspiration has been accompanied by an increase in skill.) But amid the panoply of fake theatrics—the dire stares, the heaven-beseeching arms, the before-the-breakdown smiles—which accompanied the solos, technique counted for little. I sat and waited for this show to end.

The same approach—forget flamenco, just give them a good time—ruled the offering of the Ballet Flamenco de Andalucía. Cristina Hoyos, a great flamenco star of the nineteen-seventies and eighties, took over this company in 2004. I don't know what she's done for the troupe, but what she did for the show she presented at the festival was to make it a vanity production. Now in her late fifties, Hoyos will apparently no longer risk solos. Accordingly, neither does her company. She allowed one exception. A tall, skinny man called El Junco, with a lot of hair falling into his face, did a serious *zapateado*, or virtuoso footwork display, near the start of the program. But, apart from that, this show, called "Journey to the South," was a big, corny, everyone-together allegory about the heart's progression from "happiness" (travel clothes, high spirits) to "tragedy" (black gowns, prie-dieux) to "passion" (red dresses, major stamping). Again, the makers of the show, Hoyos (the choreographer) and Ramón Oller (the director), seemed to sense that more was needed. Therefore, they miked the band so heavily that you couldn't distinguish the sound of the *palmas*—the musicians' hand-clapping—from that of the dancers' foot-stamping. That is, you couldn't hear the footwork, which is about half of the art. Between sections, Hoyos would come out in a better gown than anyone else's and wave her arms around.

For the time being, however, flamenco is still breathing, as could be seen in the "Gala Flamenca" which opened the festival, a showcase of beautiful, non-narrative, non-ensemble, non-overmiked acts. Among them was the festival's greatest routine, a *siguiriya* performed by Soledad Barrio. The *siguiriya* is the most tragic of flamenco dances. In her version, Barrio seemed to take us through the whole history of human pain. Brook Zern, a flamenco specialist, once told Jennifer Dunning, of the *Times*, "Flamenco at its best—at its most flamenco—strips away everything artificial and inessential, in a struggle to reveal the deepest human truths. In fact, it is the struggle itself, and not any polished final product, that's the essence and point of all great flamenco performances." That's what you saw in Barrio. She groped, she paused, she dove, she came up for air, she dove again. Her singers did the same. At the end, three *cantaores* came downstage and stood directly opposite her, screaming their song at her. She faced them down, raised her arms like a succubus, and the lights went out. Barrio's own company, Noche Flamenca, is appearing at Joe's Pub March 8th-12th, and she will star. Be there.

Barrio wasn't the only wonderful thing in the "Gala Flamenca." We got to see Rafael Campallo, a young cool cat, storming around in a pea-green jacket, doing a lot of questionably flamenco moves, plus, if I understood him correctly, making some dirty jokes. Still, it was flamenco. The form is like a language: you can explode it, embellish it, degrade it, but if you're doing a solo to the counts, and listening to your singer, and making a journey, you're still in the picture. The audience loved this naughty boy, and rightly so. Soon after him came his opposite, Manolo Marín, a man in his late sixties and a famed flamenco choreographer (he directed the gala), being cool in the opposite way: dancing with dignity and cheer and no push whatsoever. People lament flamenco's exclusions, but what about its inclusions? Like tap, it accommodates men and women, young bucks and old pros, lyricists and pile-drivers—everyone, or everyone who can do it.

That versatility was the theme of the festival's final offering, "De Tablao," a tribute to the old-time flamenco bars, by the Compañía Antonio el Pipa. The lovely thing about this show, apart from its *tablao*-like informality, was its age range. El Pipa had a bevy of cute young women dancing in ruffled gowns, but the accent was on veterans, the dancer Concha Vargas plus two redoubtable *cantaores:* Juana la del Pipa, Antonio's aunt, who looks like the oracle at Delphi; and the charming, bossy Mariana Cornejo, who came down to the apron of the stage and sang a song that, whether we understood the words or not, clearly told us what was what. Within and between their numbers, el Pipa, exuberantly affected, and with many changes of Regency neckwear, came out and did the steps and had a great old time, as did we.

Such flamenco shows, with their air of spontaneity and their fine solos bursting out and then going away, are worth remembering, for if I am not mistaken they will soon be erased in the march toward modernity or—let's say it—salability. The *flamencos* are perhaps more excusable than other artistic progressives. Under Franco's regime, the Spanish were largely isolated from modernist trends in dance. For them, there was no slow process of percolation, assimilation. After Franco, they were dumped out of what was basically a nineteenth-century aesthetic into the world of late-twentieth-century commercial trash. So, alongside the remnants of *flamenco puro*, or at least *flamenco interesante*, that's what we're getting: a marriage of flamenco with MTV. What will come of this? Last year, Robert Browning said, of the flamenco innovators, "There is always the danger of ending up in a Las Vegas show. On the other hand, you have to be open to new ideas." Nice sentiment, but how come the resulting product so often tips toward Vegas?

There's a trend here, and not just in dance. All the arts have been affected by the technological media; in all of them we now see—maybe just creeping, but creeping steadily—that flash, that speed, that lack of naturalness and intimacy, indeed of *thought*. Perhaps we should take comfort in reading critics from the past, always deploring the new trends—unrhymed verse, discordant music, Martha Graham. Maybe this media-driven amplification will produce something wonderful, which simply isn't clear yet. I don't think so, though. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

CANDID CAMERAS

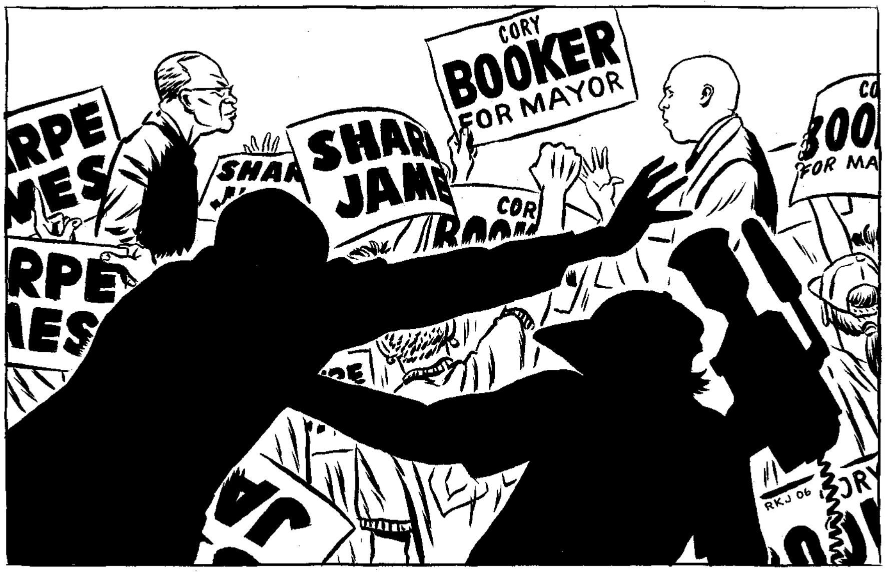
Three new documentaries.

BY DAVID DENBY

Like rival gladiators whose pride won't let them ignore a taunt, two Newark pols are about to go at it again. Just a couple of weeks ago, Cory Booker, a thirty-six-year-old lawyer and former city councilman, kicked off his second campaign for mayor of Newark. The current mayor, Sharpe James, who is seventy and has held the office since 1986, hasn't yet announced whether he will run again, though, having accumulated a campaign chest of two million dollars, James is unlikely to retire from the scene with a polite thank-you note to his backers. If he does run, the race will reunite the men in a sequel to their acrimonious 2002 battle, a campaign that has been captured in the extraordinary Oscar-nominated documentary "Street Fight."

Both men are black, both are Democrats (Republicans don't much figure in Newark's politics, and elections are nonpartisan), and it's safe to say that they detest each other. The casting gods, who occasionally attend to real life, have, in this case, done their job extremely well. First, the challenger, Cory Booker: young, tall, athletic; civil-rights-activist parents; attended Stanford, Yale Law School, and Oxford, as a Rhodes Scholar. And then the old pro, Sharpe James: stocky, up-from-the-ghetto bruiser; the essence of a machine politician; an operator who sometimes delivers a skyscraper or a sports arena to Newark's downtown "renaissance." Booker, who is a bachelor and lives in a public-housing apartment, is strenuously sincere in his manner, and a little full of himself. James—who drives a Rolls and lives high—flirts, dances, and menaces his way through a campaign. One is a moralist who expects to be judged by the sternest criteria; the other is a canny mover who tells people that he has the juice, and the human understanding, to give them what they want.

In brief, Marshall Curry, the young director of "Street Fight," has hit the documentary jackpot: the movie will become the inescapable referent for media coverage of the new campaign. And rightly so. Back in 2002, Curry took a small, lightweight digital camera into Booker's campaign headquarters and into the streets for rallies, picnics, impromptu playground arguments, and much else in the feverish political life of Newark. The movie, which begins a few months before the election and concludes after voting day, is conventional in form. What has fascinated African-American commentators, however, is the way the 2002 race became a testing ground for the political weight of "blackness." Sharpe James, in his youth, struggled as a black man to make his way in politics, yet he ran a racist campaign against Cory Booker. James is dark-skinned, Booker light, and James, in a variety of ways, implied that Booker wasn't really black enough—and that he was Jewish, too, even though Booker is Baptist. "He went to Stanford, and he's Jewish," James said on the "Today" show, as if one fact inevitably followed from the other, a statement that stands out for its absurdity as well as for the brazenness of its intended smear. From the evidence of this and other scenes in the movie, James hits below the belt. When Curry attends James's rallies, he gets hassled and manhandled by thugs in the police department who figure, correctly, that he is a Booker supporter. In the middle of the fracas, he holds the camera at his waist and keeps it running, as angry faces loom over him. James's people, in their dealing with the filmmaker, reveal a good deal about their customary way of doing business.



Marshall Curry's "Street Fight" examines the 2002 mayoral race in Newark.

R. KIKUO JOHNSON

Documentary filmmaking has come alive in recent years, and one reason is that the new digital equipment makes the physical part of filmmaking a lot easier. Like similar shifts to lighter equipment in the past, digital also creates, willy-nilly, a new aesthetic and a new relation of the audience to the spectacle. The invention, in the nineteen-twenties, of the Bell & Howell six-pound, hand-held camera made it possible in the Second World War for combat photographers to throw themselves into battle alongside infantrymen. In the early sixties, the development of lightweight 16-mm. cameras with magazines holding four hundred feet of film allowed filmmakers to enter into volatile situations and continue shooting for ten minutes at a time. The heart of cinéma vérité, or "direct cinema," was the existential self-creation of the filmmaker as he responded to the life unfolding around him. Filmmakers like Curry have taken this strategy a step further. He recorded the sound himself, and didn't have lights or a crew. His little Sony PD-150 must have looked like a toy. The one-man filmmaker has passed from amateur to professional.

There are other good reasons for the documentary explosion. The commercial networks may have given up on documentaries, but public- and cable-television stations both finance and exhibit nonfiction films. And, as in the sixties, the political atmosphere is ripe for film journalism: public life is awash in scoundrels, liars, and deluded ideologues; all over the world, cultural conflict is playing out on the streets. The adventure of filmmaking has become irresistible again.

Another young director, Rachel Boynton, has also made a campaign film—"Our Brand Is Crisis," which chronicles what happened a few years ago when some of President Clinton's former consultants—James Carville, Stan Greenberg, and Jeremy Rosner—attempted to get Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, or Goni, as everyone calls him, back into office in Bolivia. Goni, a successful businessman who grew up in the United States, had been President of the country from 1993 to 1997, and had instituted a center-left program of privatization combined with social security and national health care. (He left office because Bolivian Presidents cannot serve consecutive terms.) When he ran again, in 2002, he hired the Clinton gang to apply the advanced technology of campaigning—polls, focus groups, advertising, branding—in a country that was sliding into populist and nationalist outrage over his practice of selling shares in Bolivian enterprises to foreign investors. As throngs of campesinos gathered in the streets, the Americans managed to get their man elected in a crowded field, but with only twenty-two per cent of the vote, and he resigned after a year. The movie ends with the exiled Goni back in America, sitting alone, staring at the Washington Monument in chagrin.

Like Curry, Boynton follows the campaign from beginning to end. But she also cuts in rueful interviews with the principals which she filmed afterward, so we get reflections on the disaster as we watch it unfold. Goni, it turns out, was a wealthy industrialist unable or unwilling to make a connection with an enraged people. But that's only part of the problem. The Clintonites are caught in a painful bind. They may be right in their belief that Goni's brand of capitalism-plus-benefits is the best way for Bolivia to climb out of poverty, but, for all their intelligence and sensitivity, they used campaign methods that, in a poor country in turmoil, were pathetically beside the point. Among other things, "Our Brand Is Crisis" is about the failure of good intentions—a potent American theme at the moment. As the movie suggests, this failure, born of American arrogance, embraces liberals as well as neocons, though the liberals, to their credit, do occasionally take responsibility for their mistakes. In a long, unhappy interview, Jeremy Rosner, pondering the futility of his actions in Bolivia, looks like an animal eating its young.

Something's getting swallowed in Lake Victoria, too. Everything, in fact. The Nile perch, a huge exotic fish that was introduced there in a misbegotten experiment in the nineteen-sixties, has become a predator that has eliminated more than two hundred other species, and has turned a mixed economy that flourished around the lake into a voracious mono-economy. In "Darwin's Nightmare," another Oscar-nominated documentary, the Austrian filmmaker Hubert Sauper settled into the lakefront town of Mwanza, Tanzania, one of those anomalous, raffishly sinister Conradian places which dot the earth. There's a big European market for the perch, which draws people from the countryside to work at the lake, but catching the fish is so dangerous that many young men die, and many others end up as servants or prostitutes. Every day, crews from a Russian cargo company fly hundreds of tons of perch fillets out of Mwanza, but the workers are so poorly paid that they can't afford to eat any—they're left with the head and bones. Yet, if Sauper is fired up by anti-globalist conviction, his instincts as an artist and as a man rule out any kind of rhetoric or cheapness. "Darwin's Nightmare" is a fully realized poetic vision. The enormous Ilyushin cargo planes cast strange shadows on the water as they fly in and out; the town, which has been devastated by AIDS, is an incoherent gathering place of vulnerable fishermen, drunken pilots, prostitutes longing to get out, and orphaned children getting stoned on the streets at night. The dolorousness of the scene is overpowering, but so is the beauty of the faces and the landscape, and Sauper, moving in close, establishes an unusual intimacy with his subjects. The men, women, and children get a chance to explain their own roles in an inexorable process in which nearly everyone, sooner or later, becomes a victim. ♦

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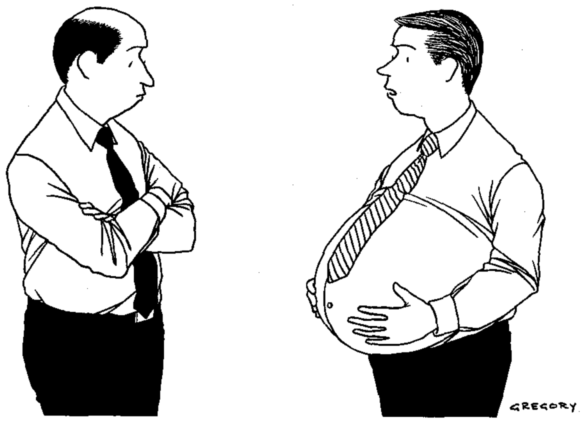
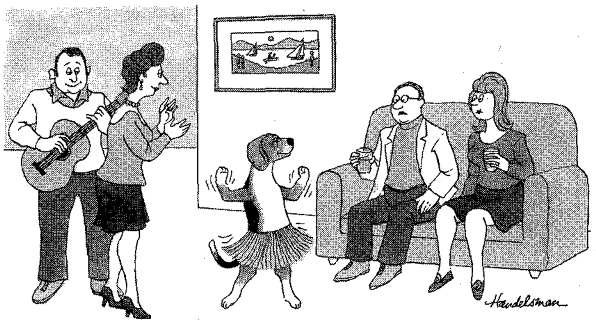
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Harry Bliss, must be received by Sunday, March 5th. Finalists in the February 13th & 20th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the March 20th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"The ultrasound says it's a keg of Bud Light."
Jude Person, Conception, Mo.



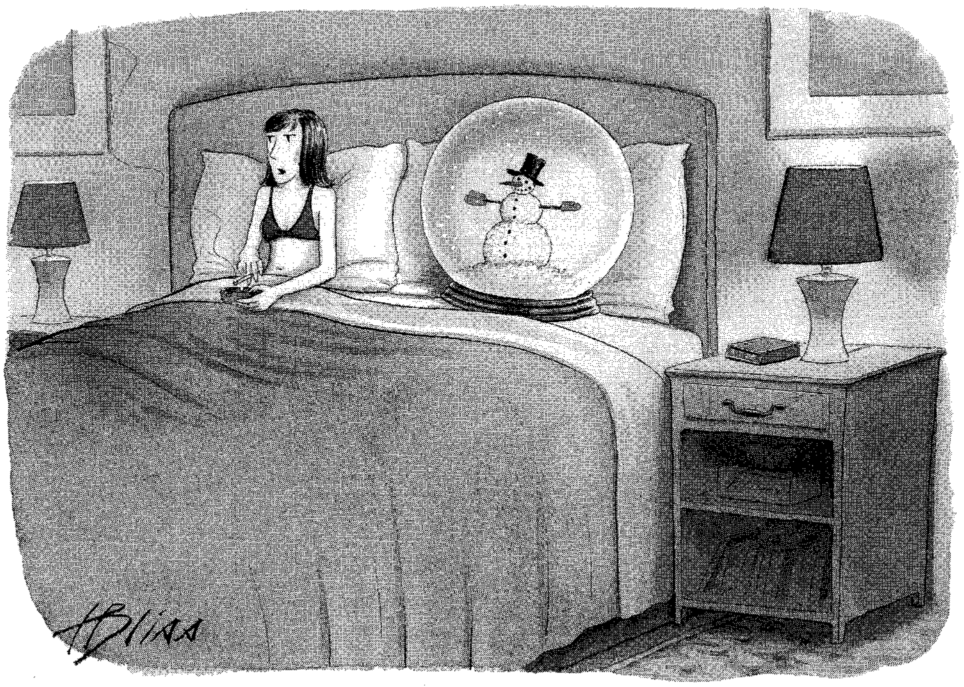
THE FINALISTS

"That's the last time we brag about our kids."
Gloria Feinberg, Philadelphia, Pa.

"At the end of the day, I guess I'm just really more of a cat person."
Iona Brindle, Los Angeles, Calif.

"Sure, she's cute, but she'll never have a dancer's body."
Thomas Brown, Guilford, Conn.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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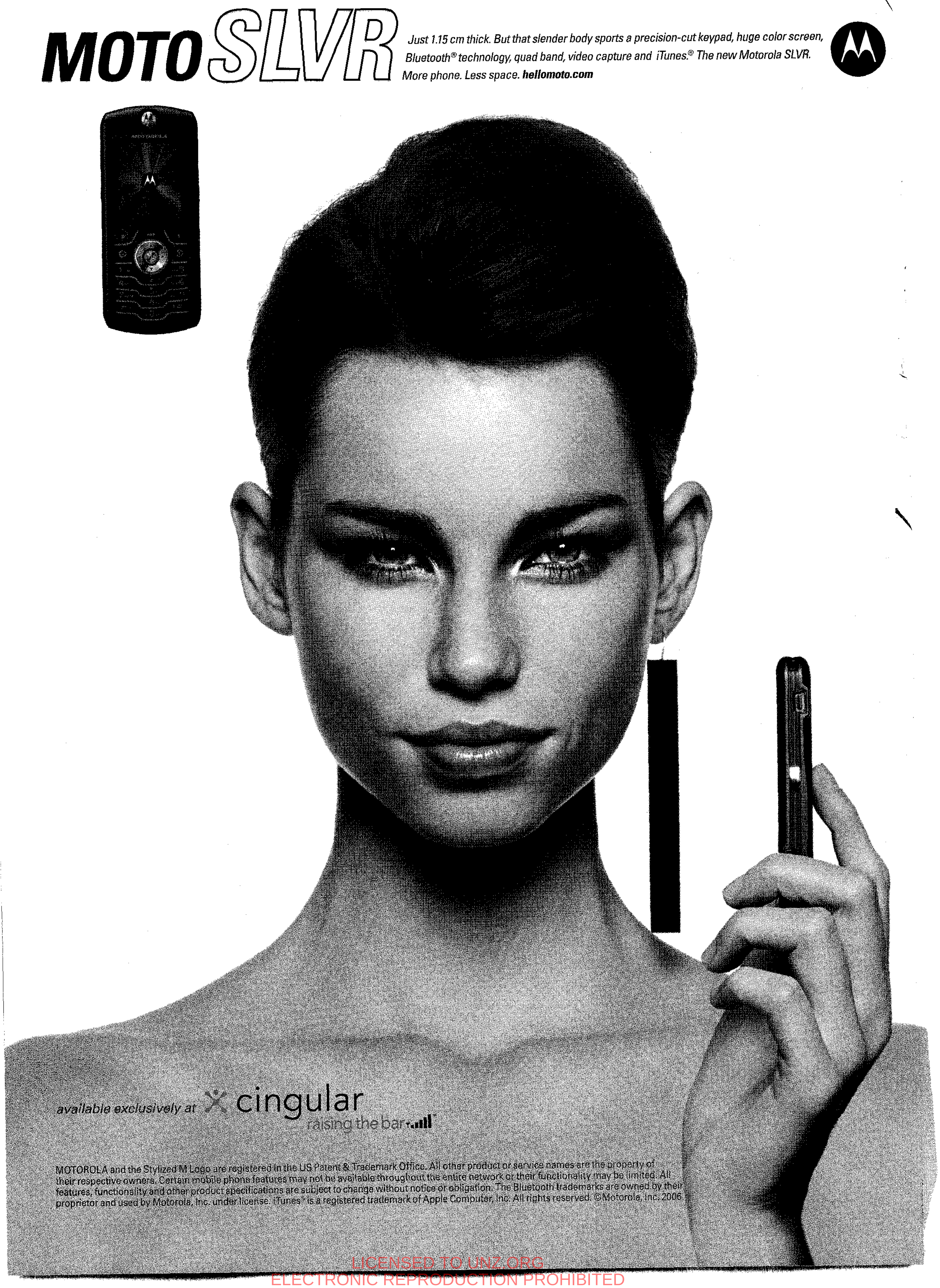

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